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THE NEW YORKER

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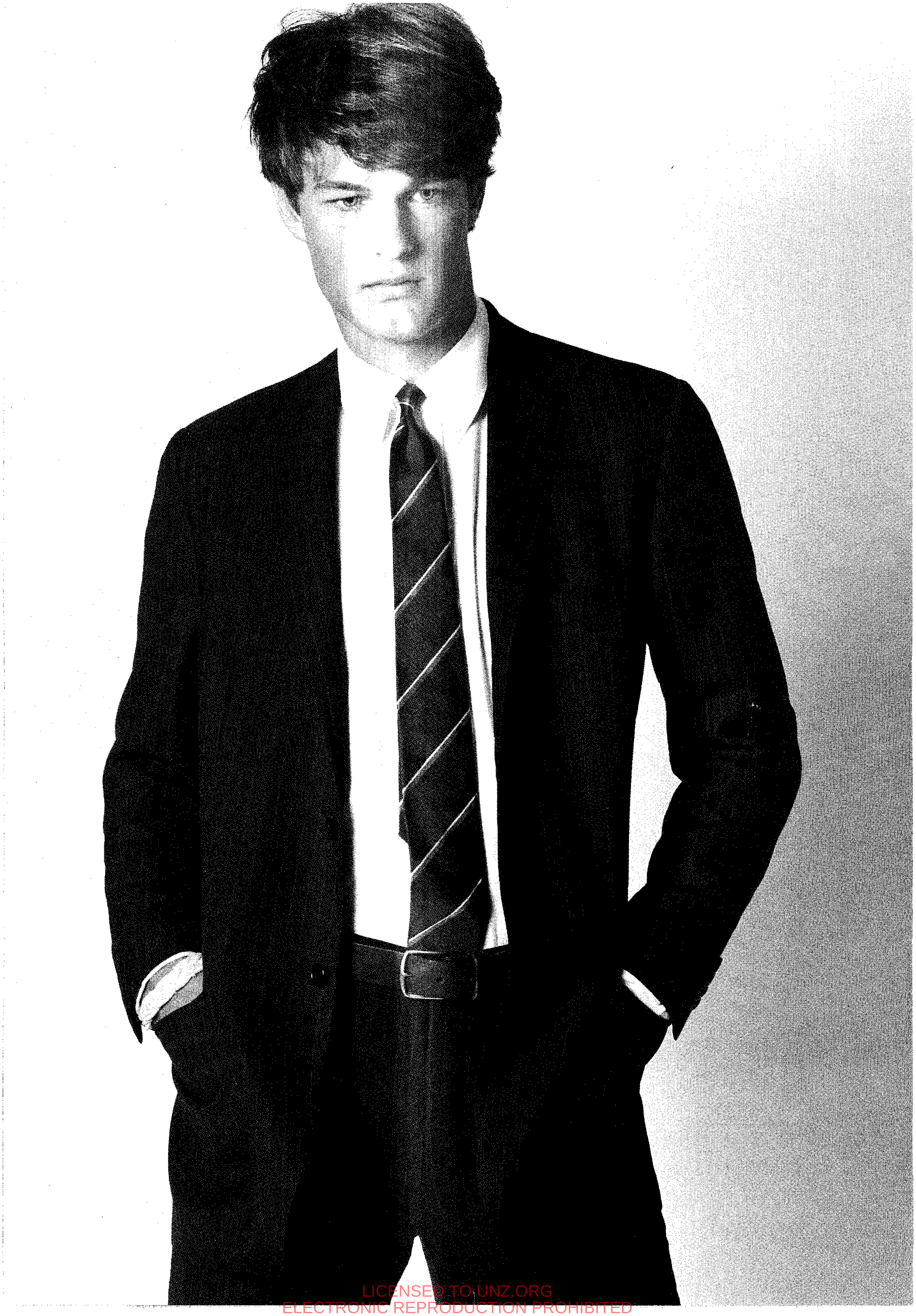

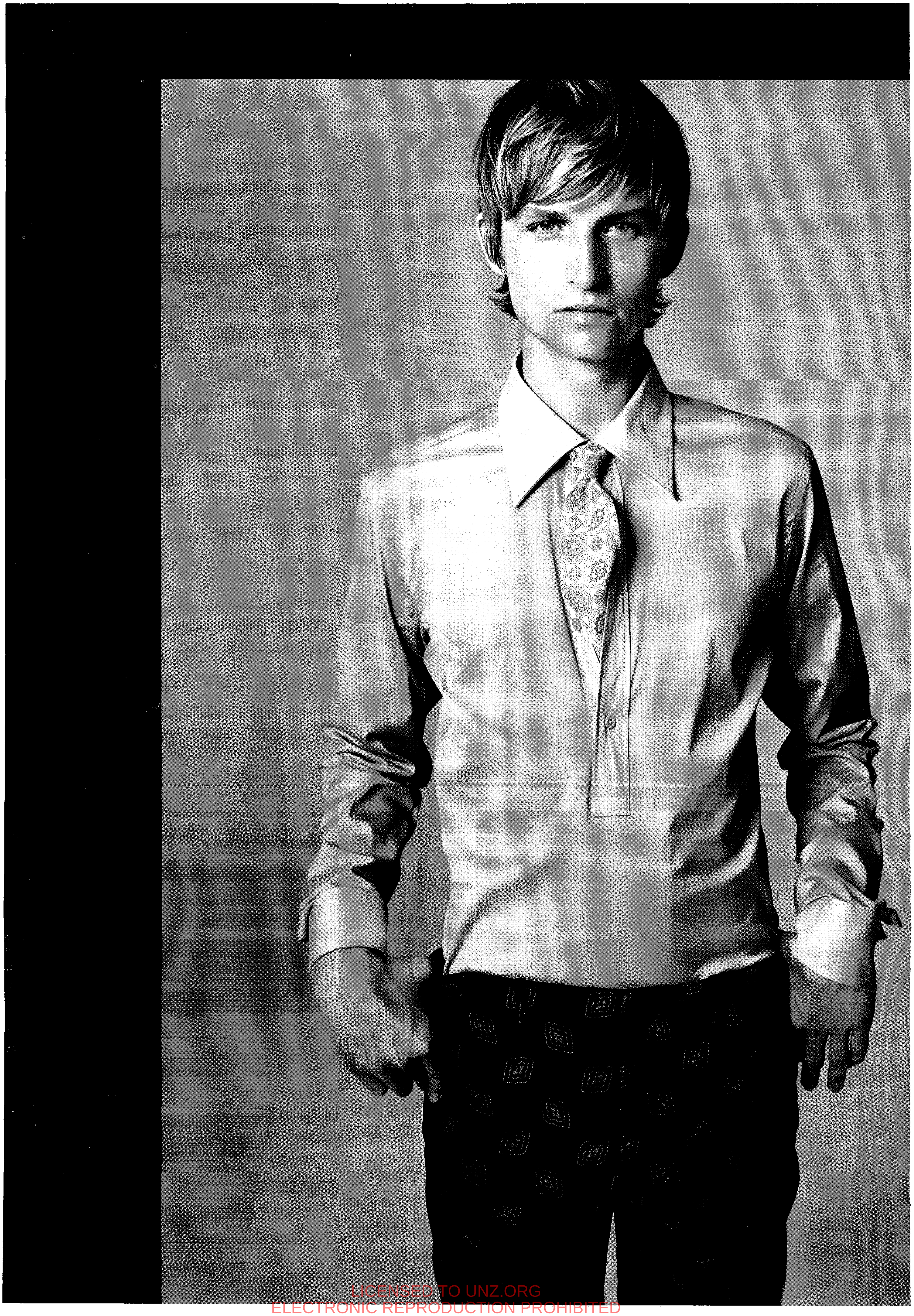

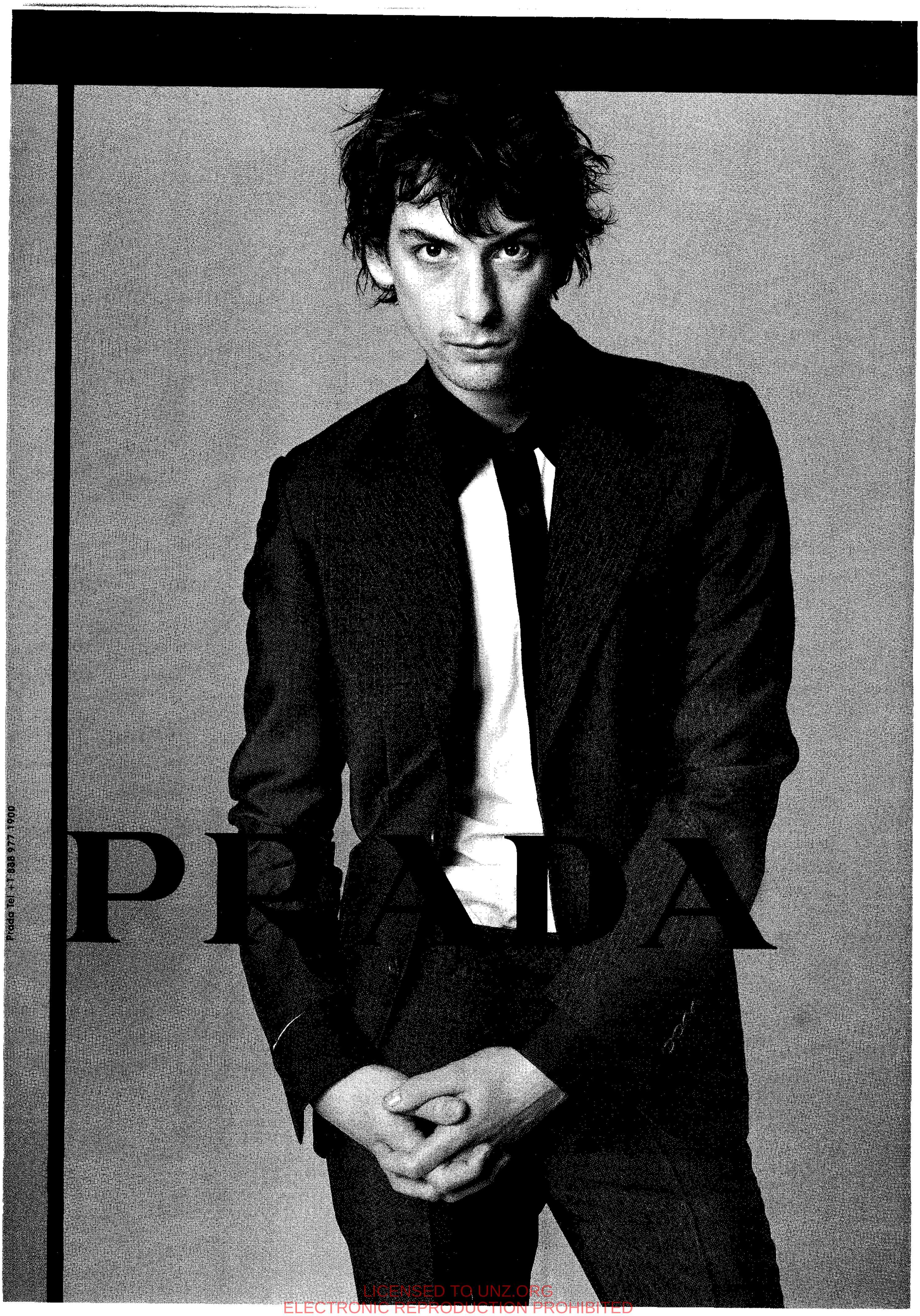

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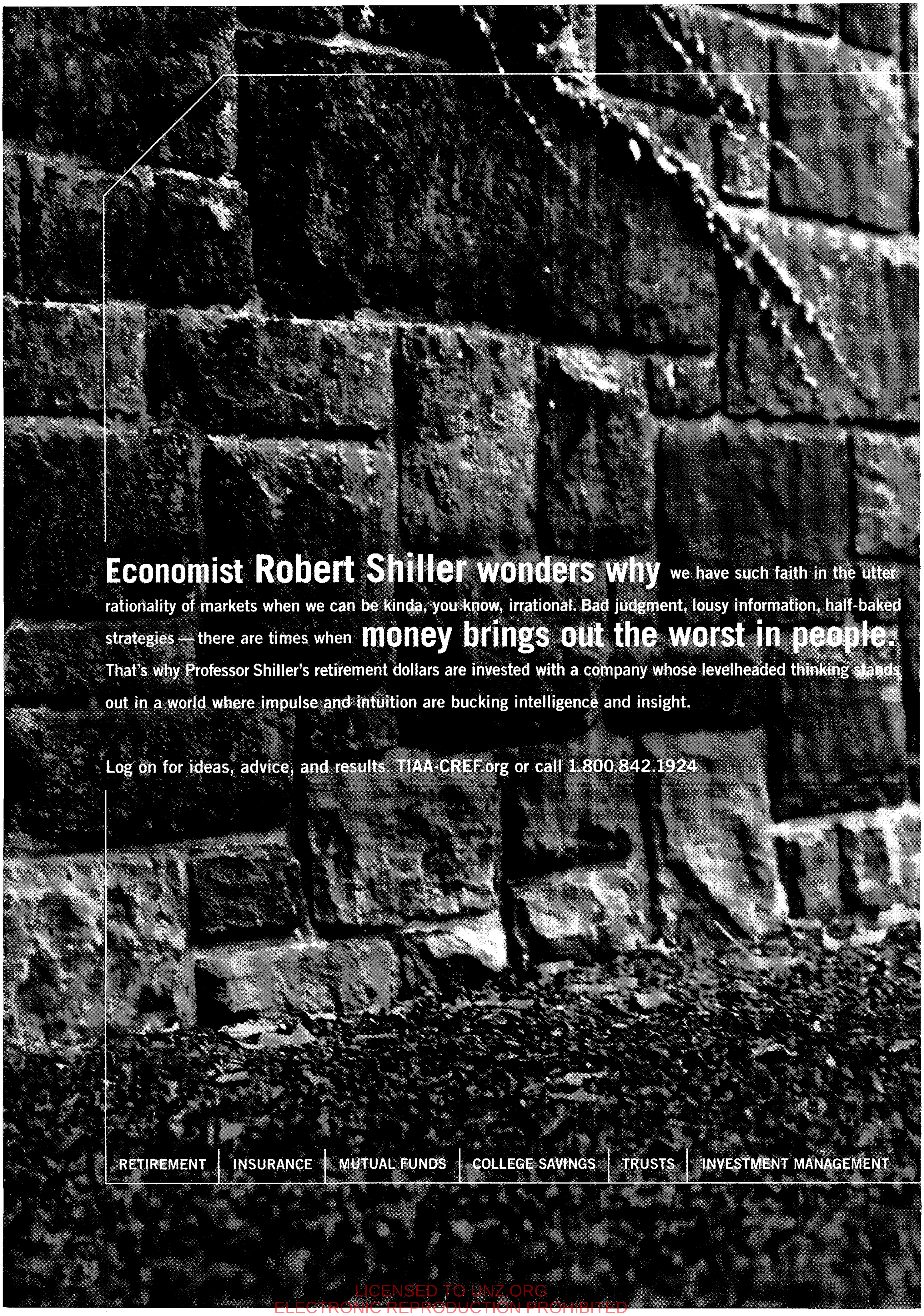

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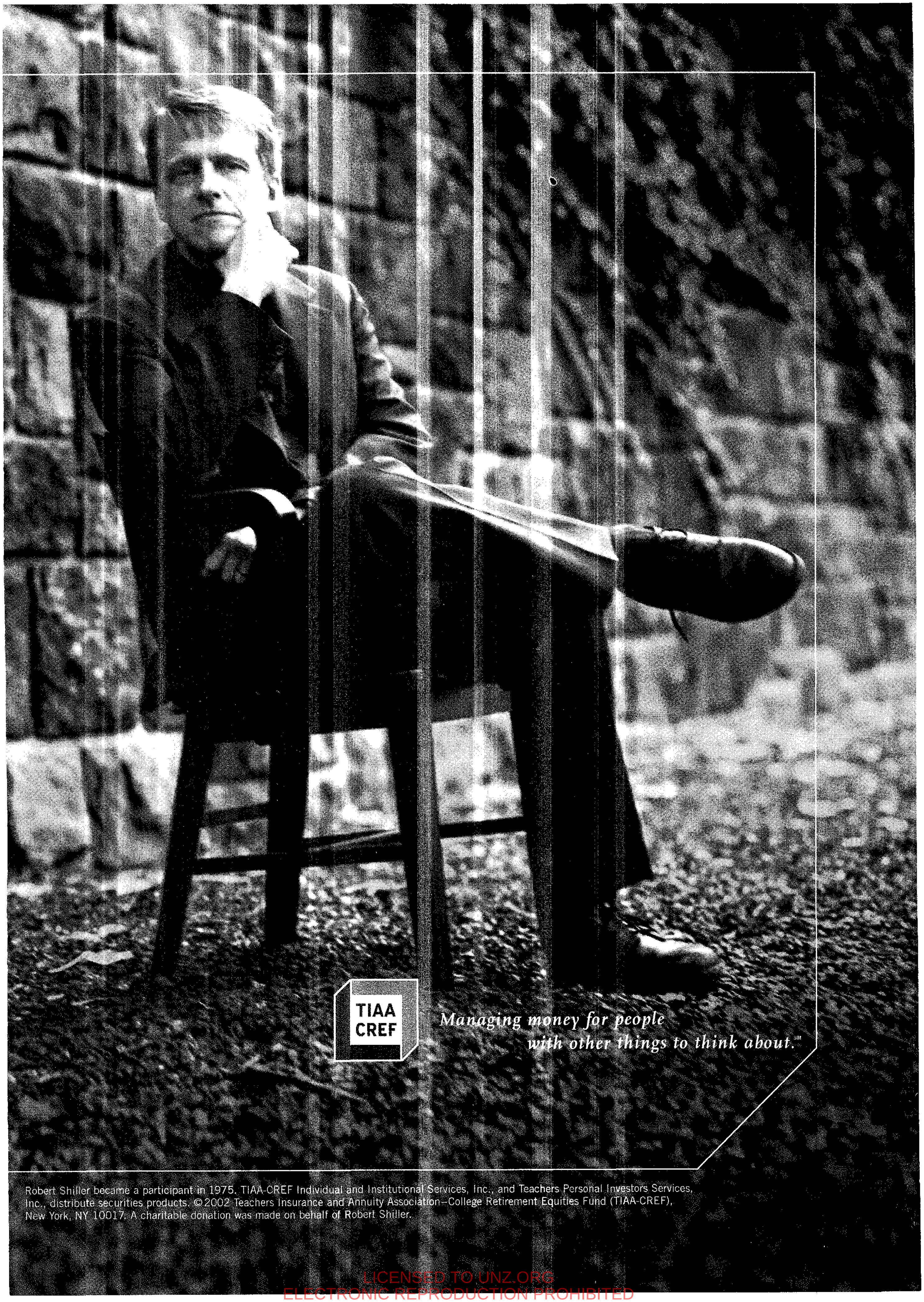
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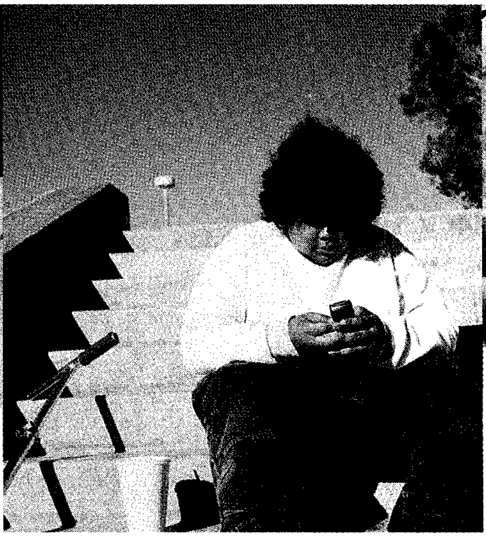

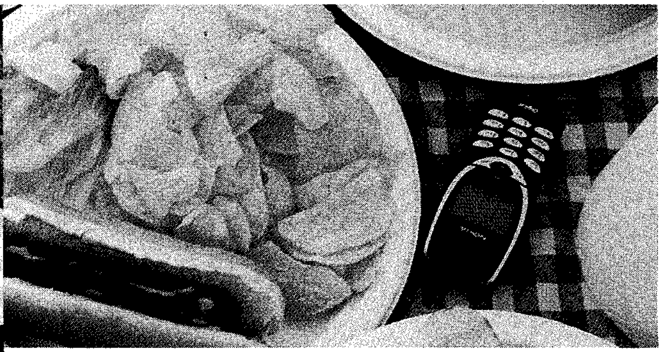

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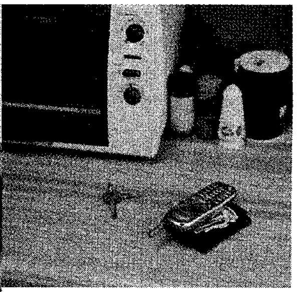

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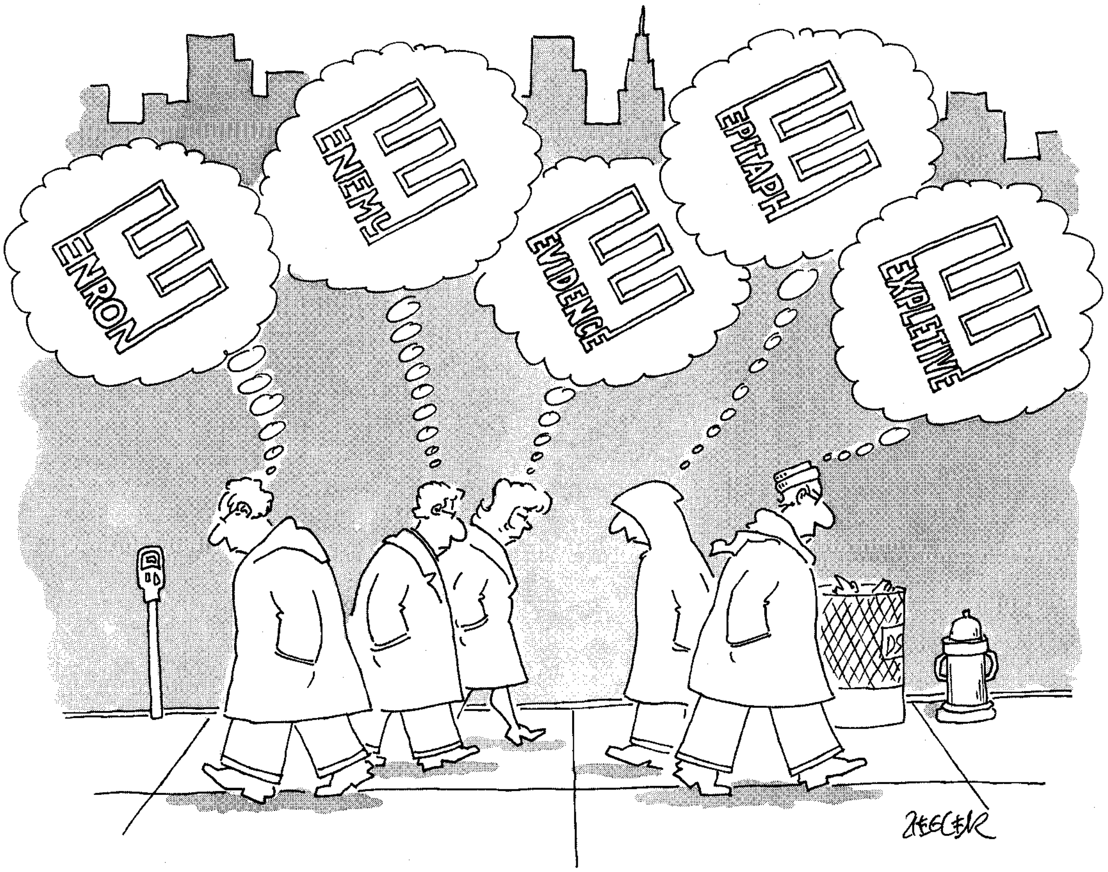

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Susan Orlean ("The Lady and the Tigers," p. 95) has written five books, including "The Orchid Thief" and "The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup," which is now out in paperback.

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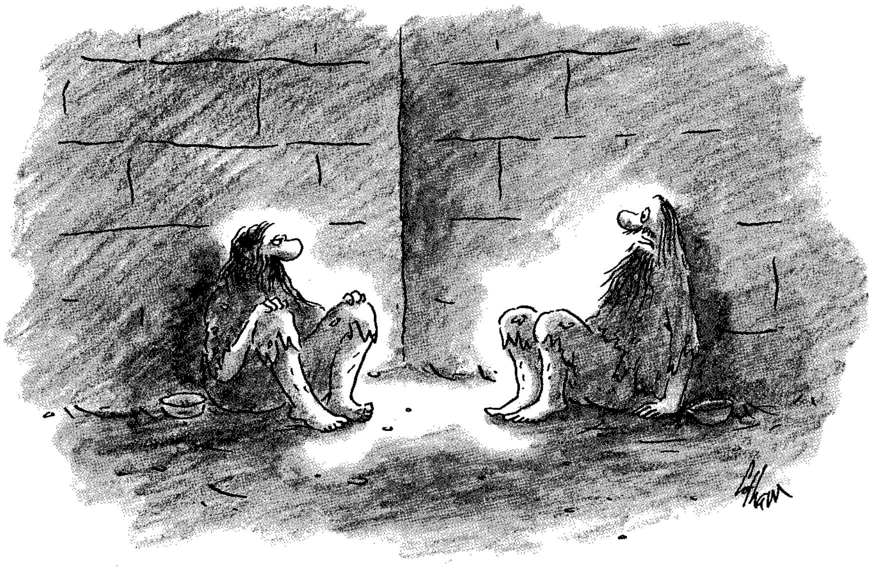
Alex Ross (A Critic at Large, p. 176) is the magazine's music critic. ♦



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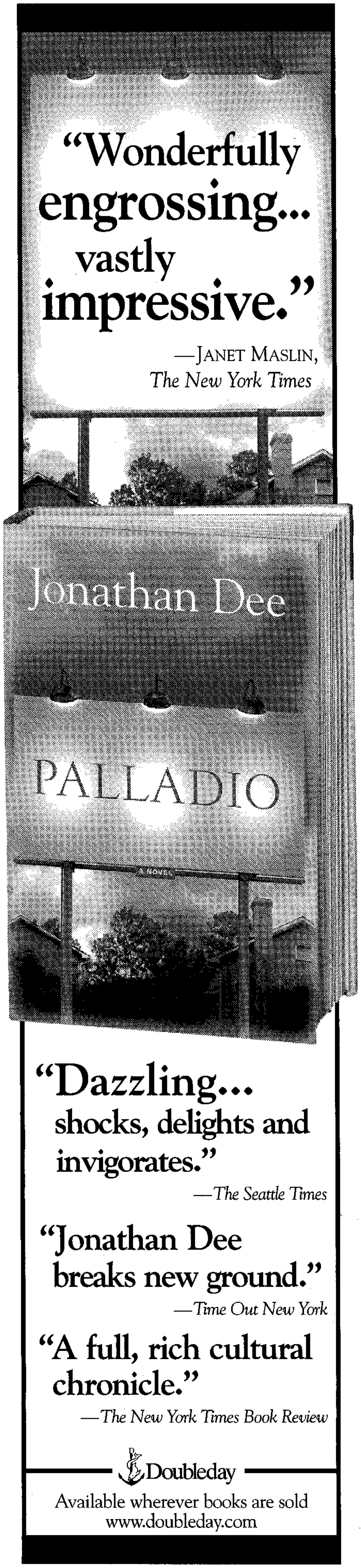

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THE MIND'S EYE

I was struck by a line in Anthony Lane's review of "A Beautiful Mind" (The Current Cinema, January 7th)—"We simply find it hard to watch the strong play the weak"—in reference to what he sees as the miscasting of the "officially designated hunk" Russell Crowe as John Nash, the mathematician (and Nobel laureate) who suffered from schizophrenia. To characterize Nash, whether the real-life or the movie version, as weak misses the point. For mathematicians like Nash, a breakthrough that is glimpsed in a moment must be supported by long, demanding work. Once Nash had an insight, he had to undertake the intense mental labor of producing the mathematical proof. In the film, Nash learns to control his illness, and even, to a limited extent, returns to his work, in part through rigorous analysis and in part through courage—not a quality that anyone would consider weak.
Truck Smith
Garden Grove, Calif.

As a psychiatrist who has seen many young men (with beautiful minds) and their families struggle with schizophrenia, I was deeply moved by "A Beautiful Mind." Lane, however, judges it harshly, in part because of what he sees as inaccuracies in its depiction of Nash's life. This is unfair to a film that, viewed on its own terms, captures the essence of a devastating illness. Lane is bothered by the film's suggestion that "the love of one good woman" can salvage a mentally ill person's life. But, in some cases, it can go a long way, especially when—as with Jennifer Connelly's character—someone is capable of giving support to another through a lifetime of incredible difficulty.
Ariel S. Compton
Newport Beach, Calif.

PERES'S BAD CHOICES

Shimon Peres deserves credit for his contributions to Israel's security during his early years in politics, but he should also be held accountable for many of Israel's current problems—more so than David Remnick allows ("The Dreamer," January 7th). Peres, as Minister of Defense under Yitzhak Rabin, was responsible for the establishment of all the major settlements in the Occupied Territories—settlements that are now a barrier to peace. During Peres's brief term as Prime Minister, after Rabin's assassination, he did not dismantle a single settlement but did send warplanes into Lebanon to bomb Hezbollah positions. This unnecessary action, which was meant to prove to voters in the upcoming election that he could be "tough," resulted in the death of almost a hundred refugees, many of them women and children, by a stray bomb. Now, by serving as Foreign Minister under Ariel Sharon, Peres does nothing more than place a seal of approval on Sharon's disastrous actions.
Derek Kershner
Herzliya Bet, Israel

The conventional wisdom is that Ehud Barak made far-reaching, generous proposals at Camp David that were unreasonably refused by Yasir Arafat. Remnick writes, for example, that Barak "offered virtually all of the West Bank and Gaza." But Barak's offers would have left the Palestinians with a completely fragmented West Bank, in which all existing major roads would have had to pass through settlements annexed by Israel. Putting the onus for the negotiations' failure on Arafat supports the widely held and unfortunate notion that no further concessions are due from the Israeli side.
Frank Bamberger
Brooklyn, N.Y.

CORRECTION: A story in The Talk of the Town in the issue of February 11th referred to "the late" actress Sheila Mac Rae. Mac Rae is, in fact, still alive. We regret the error.

•

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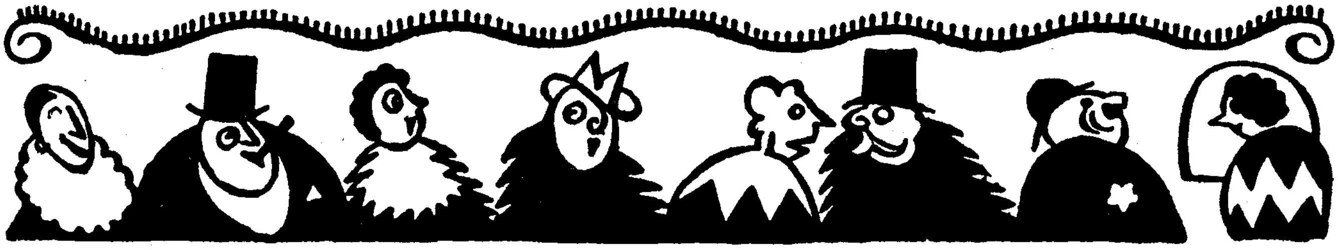

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OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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BEA ARTHUR ON BROADWAY: JUST BETWEEN FRIENDS
The stage and screen star performs songs and reminisces about her six-decade career, accompanied by the pianist Billy Goldenberg. In previews through Feb. 16. Opens Feb. 17 at 3 and runs through March 10 only. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRUCIBLE
Arthur Miller's 1953 drama stars Liam Neeson and Laura Linney, in a revival directed by Richard Eyre. Previews begin Feb. 16. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

DOUBLE AGENCY
Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, of Split Britches, have paired up with the British troupe the Clod Ensemble on their latest work, which consists of two plays, "Miss Risqué" and "It's a Small House and We've Lived in It Always." Feb. 14-16 and Feb. 21-23 at 7:30 and Feb. 17 and Feb. 24 at 2:30 and 7:30. Continues through March 3. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

ELAINE STRITCH AT LIBERTY
The Broadway star's hit one-woman show, which ran last fall at the Public Theatre, transfers to the Neil Simon Theatre. Co-created with the *New Yorker* theatre critic John Lahr and directed by George C. Wolfe. In previews through Feb. 20. Opens Feb. 21 at 6:30. (250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

FOOL FOR LOVE
A 29th Street Rep staging of Sam Shepard's 1984 play. Preview on Feb. 13. Opens Feb. 14 at 8. (212 W. 29th St. 206-1515.)

FOUR
The Worth Street Theatre Company and Manhattan Theatre Club's production of a drama by Christopher Shinn, which examines the interconnected relationships between four people on a single day—the Fourth of July, 1996—in Hartford, Connecticut. Jeff Cohen is the director. In previews through Feb. 18. Opens Feb. 19 at 7:30. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE GOAT; OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?
Bill Pullman and Mercedes Ruehl star in Edward Albee's new play, in which a celebrated architect must make a confession to his wife and son that will have ruinous effects. David Esbjornson is the director. Previews begin Feb. 16. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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JACKIE HOFFMAN'S VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE
A vaudeville examination of romance, presented by the Drama Dept. Three performances only: Feb. 14-16 at 8. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 633-9632.)

THE LAST FIVE YEARS
A new musical by Jason Robert Brown ("Parade"), which traces the relationship between a successful young novelist (Norbert Leo Butz) and a struggling actress (Sherie René Scott). Daisy Prince is the director. Previews begin Feb. 12. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

METAMORPHOSES
Mary Zimmerman's contemporary adaptation of several of Ovid's myths moves to Broadway, having opened at Second Stage last fall. Previews begin Feb. 16. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

MR. GOLDWYN
Alan King takes the stage to portray the film producer Samuel Goldwyn, in a new play by Marsha Lebby and John Lollos. Gene Saks is the director. Previews begin Feb. 26. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

NECESSARY TARGETS
In Eve Ensler's new drama, Shirley Knight and Diane Venora play a Park Avenue psychiatrist and an ambitious young writer who travel to Bosnia to help women refugees deal with their memories of war. Previews begin Feb. 14. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

OCCUPANT
Anne Bancroft returns to the stage to portray the painter Louise Nevelson, in a new drama by Edward Albee. Anthony Page is the director. In previews through Feb. 23. Opens Feb. 24 at 7. (Signature, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

OKLAHOMA!
Trevor Nunn's West End production of the 1943 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comes to Broadway. Previews begin Feb. 23. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

ONE MO' TIME
A revival of Vernel Bagneris's 1979 revue, which is set on a summer night in 1926 in New Orleans at the Lyric Theatre, where such stars as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey once performed. Mr. Bagneris will again star and direct. Previews begin Feb. 21. (Longacre, 200 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SURVIVING GRACE
A play by Trish Vradenburg, about a fraught mother-and-daughter relationship. Illeana Douglas and Doris Belack star. Jack Hofsiss is the director. Previews begin Feb. 21. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-7171.)

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS
John Lithgow is the gossip columnist J. J. Hunsecker, in a musical version of the 1957 film, with a book by John Guare, music by Marvin Hamlisch, and lyrics by Craig Carnelia. Nicholas Hytner is the director. Previews begin Feb. 23. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

TO YOU, THE BIRDIE! (PHÈDRE)
Frances McDormand, Kate Valk, and Willem Dafoe lead the cast in the Wooster Group's latest work, based on Racine's "Phèdre." Preview on Feb. 13. Opens Feb. 14 at 8. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. Brooklyn. 966-3651.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AN ALMOST HOLY PICTURE
Kevin Bacon stars in a drama by Heather McDonald, in which a church groundskeeper hears the call of God but can't figure out what he is saying. Michael Mayer is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

THE BRIDGE IN SCARSDALE
Jacques Lévy ("Oh! Calcutta!") is the director of a new play by Robert Remington Wood, about a bridge designer, his estranged painter wife, who has been institutionalized for twenty-five years, and their son, who reunites them. (Phil Bosakowski Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 16.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

CYMBELINE
Beneath the convolutions of Shakespeare's plot—a motley of folktales and history—there is abundant passion, comedy, and lyricism to be gleaned, and the director Bartlett Sher and his Theatre for a New Audience company have struck it rich. They mine each scene for its dramatic, emotional core, and play up the absurdities as they arise. It's an international Shakespearean smorgasbord, really: scenes of eastern Britain are flavored with theatrical elements of the Far East, and western Britain takes on the drawl of the Wild West, and it's all

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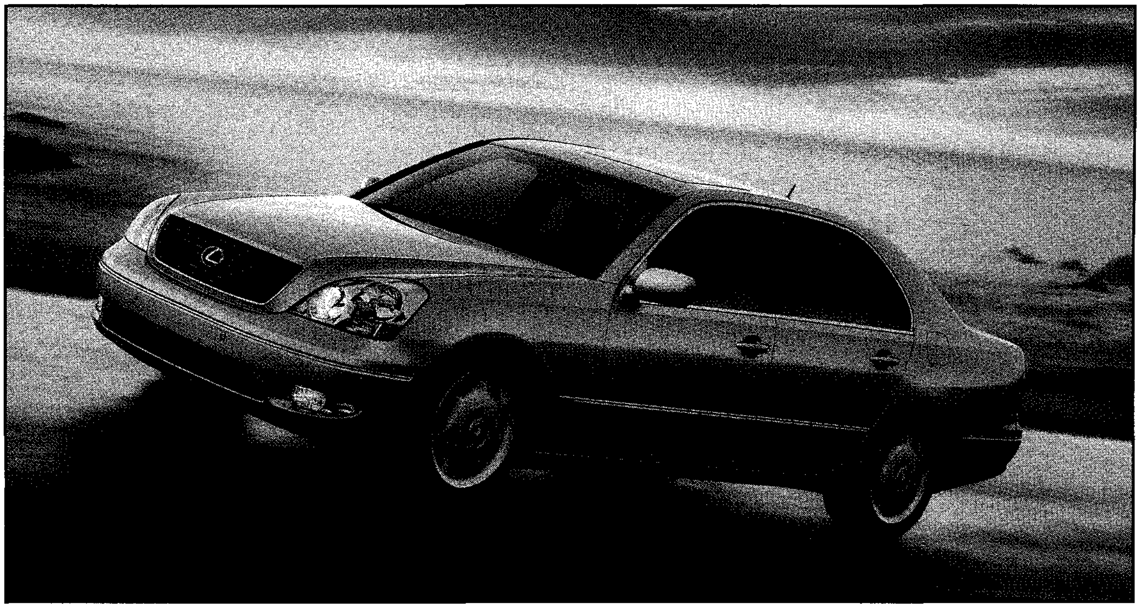

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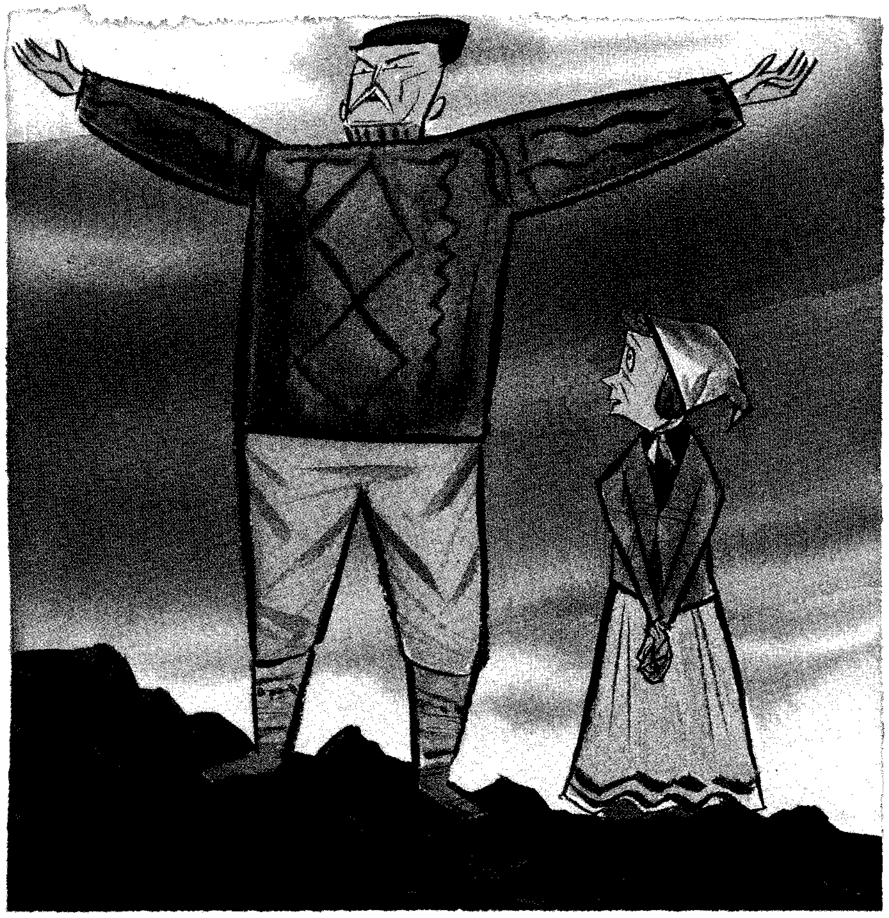
bound together with the help of song, pantomime, and pageantry. And there are at least three top-notch performances: Boris McGiver as Iachimo, the cunning seducer; Earl Hindman as Belarius, an exiled soldier (cowboy poetry was never thus); and Andrew Weems as Cloten, a whiny samurai. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. Closes March 3.)

DEAD TECH
Kristin Marting and Celise Kalke's adaptation of Ibsen's "The Master Builder" incorporates seminal architectural and technological literature. With music by Todd Griffin. (Puritan Iron Foundry, 56 Water St. Brooklyn. 212-647-0202.)



"Further Than the Furthest Thing," by Zinnie Harris, at Manhattan Theatre Club.

MARCELLUS HALL

FINDER'S FEE
A play by Wesley Moore, about a real-estate deal gone bad. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556. Closes March 3.)

FURTHER THAN THE FURTHEST THING
Zinnie Harris's play, which is set partly on the real and remote South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha and partly in what the islanders call "the houtside world"—England—takes an imaginative leap into and beyond history. It is 1961, and a volcanic eruption forces the evacuation of all the islanders, wresting them away from their world of black sand and crawfish and penguins and plunging them into factory life and damp employee housing. But the play, which was first produced in London two years ago, is not a romanticization of a paradise lost—there is a tragedy in the island's past, and it still lodges in the lives of an older couple (Robert Hogan and Jenny Sterlin) and the nephew they raised (Dan Futterman). In their relationship to the island and to their current circumstances, they are psychically caught between a rock and a hard place. The cast, under the direction of Neil Pepe, also includes Jennifer Dundas and Peter Gerety. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

GILLETTE
N.F.L. Hall of Fame running back John Riggins portrays a good old boy in his late forties, who moves to Wyoming to make cash working on an oil rig. Written by Will Hauptman. (Storm Theatre, 145 W. 46th St. 800-965-4827.)

THE GUYS
In Anne Nelson's play, an editor (Sigourney Weaver) helps a fire chief (Bill Irwin) write eulogies for the funerals of eight of his men killed in the September 11th attacks. Jim Simpson is the director. (The Flea, 41 White St. 226-2407.)

HOMEBODY/KABUL
Tony Kushner's play, set in London and Afghanistan in 1998, concerns the necessity and the dangers of engagement with the world, and it is no surprise, really, that this most political of playwrights should have happened to be thinking for the last several years about matters that until recently did not engage most people in this country. The first act consists of an hour-long monologue by a middle-aged Englishwoman, memorably brought to life by Linda Emond, who is a lover of old books and lost causes—these she finds "irrelevant and irresistible," and part of what makes her words so riveting is that it's never entirely clear whether her attachment to the dustbin of history has more to do with history or with the dustbin. The character is a fascinating study in both isolation and passion. Her desire to act, to be part of history—to not remain "suspended in the Rhetorical Colloidal Forever that agglutinates between Might and Do"—leads her to Kabul, where she disappears. In a way, that's when the play disappears, too; it is at its most powerful before it ever leaves home. The subsequent three hours devolve into an unsatisfying tangle of themes and characters, but such is the strength of the first act—and of Emond's performance—that the sense that something important is at stake carries through. The cast of eleven is under the direction of Declan Donnellan. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/28/02.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

LAPIS BLUE BLOOD RED
Cathy Caplan's drama about the life of the Italian baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi, based in part on her letters and the court transcripts from the trial of a man accused of raping her and stealing one of her paintings. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes March 3.)

MAMMA MIA!
This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between the band's No. 1 singles. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARIA DEL BOSCO (SEX & RACING CARS: A SOUND OPERA)
The avant-garde playwright Richard Foreman's fiftieth play. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

THE MATCHMAKER
Anna Manahan and Des Keogh portray twenty different characters, in John B. Keane's play, set in rural western Ireland in the nineteen-fifties. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

MONSTER
Michael Greif ("Rent") is the director of a new play by Neal Bell, based on Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein." (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210. Closes Feb. 17.)

NATIVE SON
The Classical Theatre of Harlem presents an adaptation of Richard Wright's novel, written and directed by Christopher McElroen. (Harlem School of the Arts Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 539-8828. Closes Feb. 24.)

NOISES OFF
Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast—Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher, Richard Easton, Faith Prince, Edward Hibbert, Katie Finneran, T. R. Knight, Thomas McCarthy, and Robin Weigert—shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

ONE MAN
The British actor Steven Berkoff is in town for a seven-week engagement of his latest show, a trio of monologues: "The Tell-Tale Heart," adapted from Poe, and "Actor" and "Dog," which Mr. Berkoff wrote. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983.)

PERMANENT VISITOR
A two-month festival of plays about or by Dawn Powell, or based on her works. (78th Street Theatre, 236 W. 78th St. 206-1515. Closes March 9.)

PETER AND WENDY
A Bunraku-puppet adaptation of J. M. Barrie's classic children's tale, from the experimental troupe Mabou Mines. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Closes Feb. 24.)

THE PHANTOM LADY
A Pearl Theatre production of the seventeenth-century Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón de La Barca's cloak-and-sword comedy. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 598-9802. Closes Feb. 24.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendy) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

RUNT OF THE LITTER
The former Houston Oiler Bo Eason performs his semiautobiographical one-man show, about a small-town boy who makes it to the N.F.L. (MCC Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 206-1515. Closes March 10.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY
"A little coitus / Never hoit us," John Leguizamo jokes in his third one-man Broadway show, a crowd-pleasing hip-hop account of sexual escapades. Starting with the wacky impoverishment of his Colombian-Puerto Rican upbringing and end-

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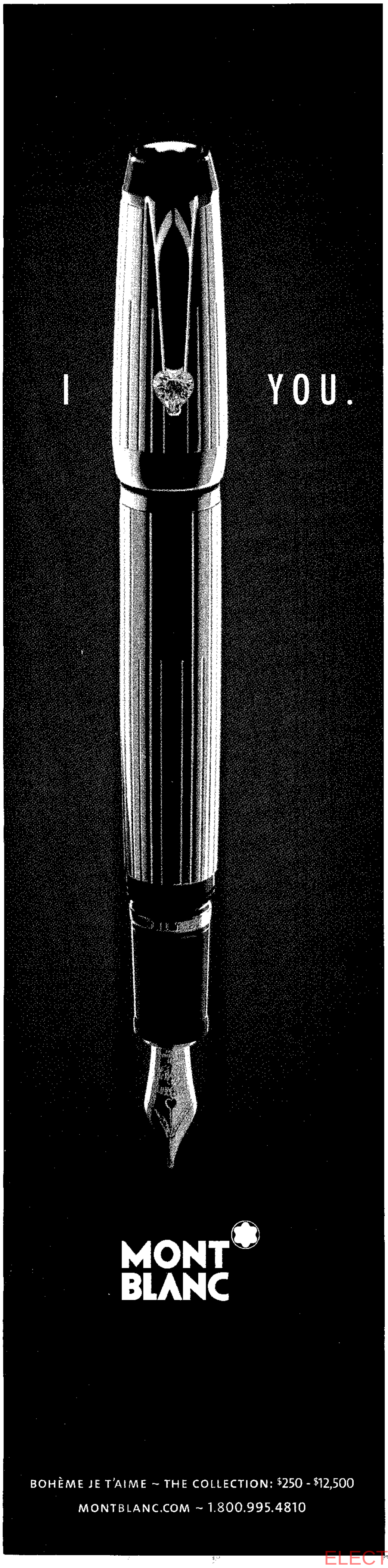

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ing with proud parenthood as the father of two "Jewricans," Leguizamo is noisy, funny, inventive, and sweet. He brings new sounds, new moves, and a new audience to the Great White Way. (He even dances in the aisles.) Next time, though, he'd do well to bring new material, too. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SORROWS & REJOICINGS
Judith Light, Charlayne Woodard, John Glover, and Marcy Harriell star in a new play by Athol Fugard, set in post-apartheid South Africa. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes Feb. 24.)

TAPE
Having seen the recent movie adaptation starring the marquee actors Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, and Robert Sean Leonard is no excuse for skipping Stephen Belber's terrific (and here expanded) play about three high-school friends (Dominic Fumusa, Josh Stamberg, and Alison West), who years after graduation find themselves unexpectedly hashing out the aftereffects of a traumatic sexual incident that has haunted each of them in different ways. The director Geoffrey Nauffts has done a great job of staging the play's new version in the tiny José Quintero Theatre; the action spans two decades but is confined to a shabby hotel room in East Lansing, Michigan. Belber has expert fun torturing his characters with the things that never get said, yet the language is uniquely telling and the underlying grief shines through. And this Off Broadway production has one thing in particular that the movie could never claim to have: the funny-sad, love-hate chemistry that endures between two true friends, Fumusa and Stamberg, for whom the play was written; it's something to see. (534 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes March 9.)

TARTUFFE
The Worth Street Theatre Company presents a new version of Molière's comedy, written and directed by Jeff Cohen. The cast includes Gerald Anthony, Crista Moore, and the playwright Keith Reddin. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515. Closes Feb. 16.)

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
This one-man show, written by Glen Berger and performed by David Chandler, manages to be both a funny tale of a Dutch librarian's midlife crisis and a serious, intriguing look at the value of any one life. After a book is returned to the library a hundred and thirteen years overdue, the librarian becomes obsessed with finding out how and why. He eventually comes to believe that the Wandering Jew was the errant borrower, whose late return of the volume is one of a series of clues he's left in a desperate attempt to document his existence. As billed, it's "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences." Directed by Randy White. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN
The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

TABLES FOR TWO

UTSAV
1185 Sixth Ave. (575-2525)—An Indian woman, a very modern lady, was once asked why, despite having lived in New York for decades, she continued to wear a sari. She replied, "Because it covers up a multitude of sins." Too often, so does Indian cooking, whose shortcomings—wan vegetables, stringy meat—can be easily disguised by a decent curry, a pot of rice, and a lump of poori. But Walter D'Rozario, the executive chef at Utsav, a two-year-old Indian restaurant in midtown, has nothing to hide. D'Rozario, from Calcutta, learned to cook in Bombay and considers himself a Bombaywallah. Nonetheless, his menu is a regular subcontinental congress, with delegates from Kashmir, Punjab, Goa, Hyderabad, Lucknow, and elsewhere. In his hands, Indian cuisine is as diverse as the subcontinent itself.

Utsav's carpeted foyer, with its vine-draped fountain and bad Muzak, is more Miami Marriott than Maharashtra. Still, the window-lined dining room, on the second floor, is broad and comfortable, suffused with peach-colored light from alabaster lamps. A bread boy in a paper hat drifts from table to table with a basket of naan. Another guy comes by with the chutneys; the tomato chutney, sweet and hot, is good enough to eat with a spoon. In the middle of the day, Utsav bustles with devotees of its inexpensive lunch buffet, a changing gauntlet of standards—palak corn, vindaloo, carrot pudding—that leaves postprandial office workers dazed in the Sixth Avenue glare.

The appetizers (or "savoury awakenings," in Utsav menuspeak) are slight and clean: stone-seared pads of lamb (patthar ka gosht), Bengali fritters, and so on. The bright-green spinach-and-pea soup is called Baisakhi, after the spring harvest festival, and amid all the lamb and lentils, it blossoms like a lily. But most of the menu is devoted to meat. The nalli rogan josh—braised lamb shanks in a thin, well-seasoned sauce—are a Kashmiri specialty, known as the "prince of curries," and the spicy peppered strips of tenderloin hail from Kerala, along the southwestern coast. There is also a wonderful coconut-flavored west-coast-fisherman's curry from Konkan. The naan man comes around again. You sop up your sauces. You contemplate "sweet fantasy." (That means dessert.) (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$29.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

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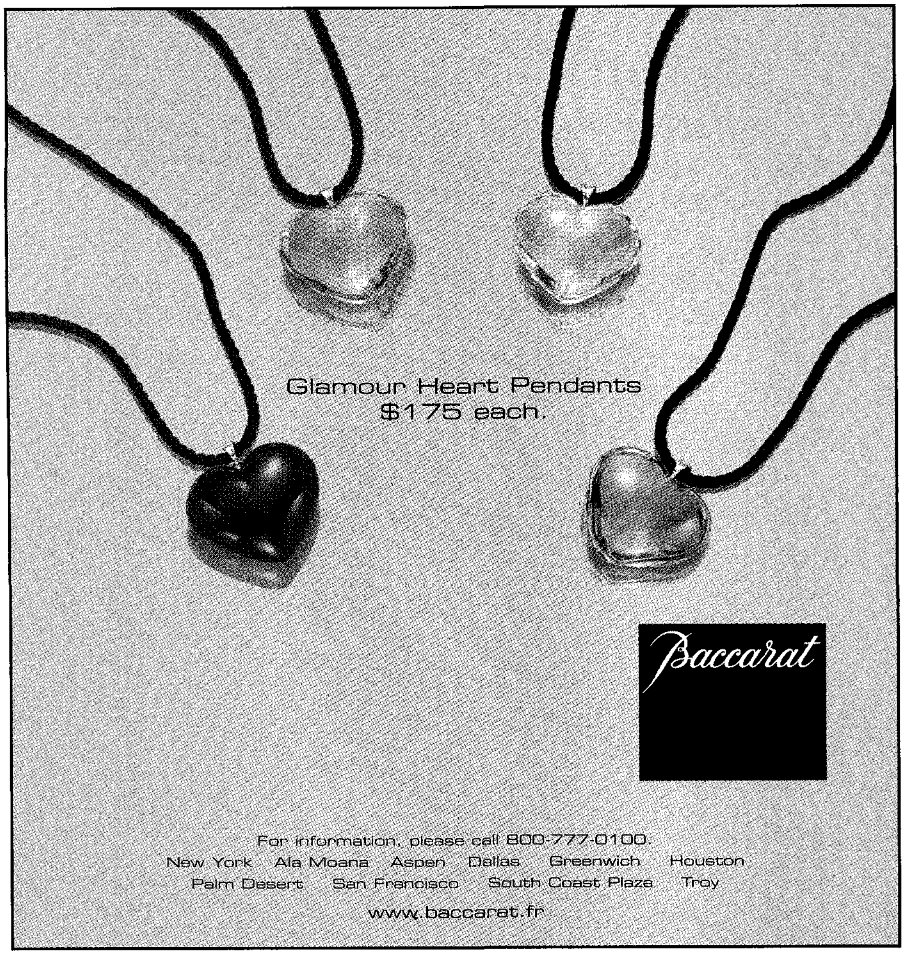
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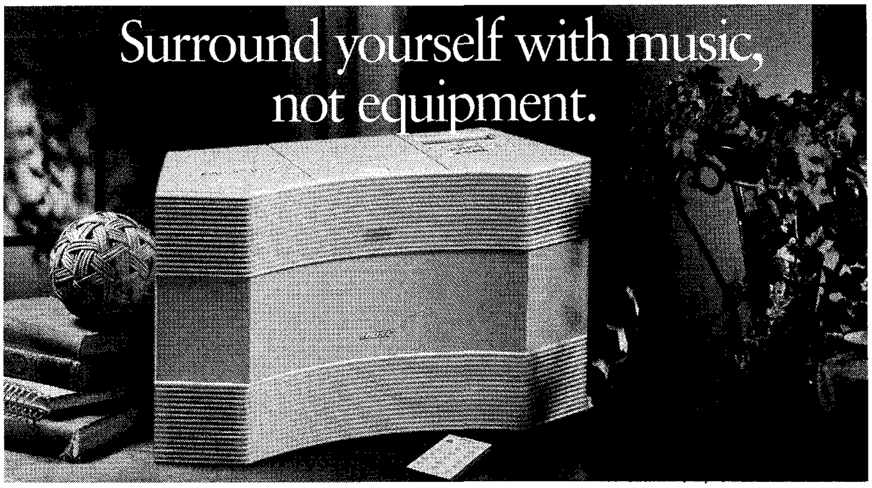

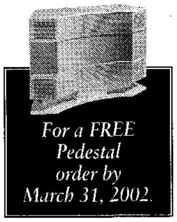

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Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.
THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.
THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Final performances of the winter season. Feb. 13 at 8: "Scotch Symphony," "Prodigal Son," and "The Concert." ♦ Feb. 14 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "Ancient Airs and Dances," and "Morgen." ♦ Feb. 15 at 8: "Ash," "Afternoon of a Faun," "A Suite of Dances," and "Serenade." ♦ Feb. 16 at 2: "Divertimento No. 15," "Morgen," and "The Concert." ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: "Scotch Symphony," "Episodes," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Feb. 17 at 3: "Ancient Airs and Dances," "Moves," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ Feb. 19 at 7:30: "Fancy Free," "Episodes," and "Firebird." ♦ Feb. 20 at 8: "Fancy Free," "Moves," and "The Concert." ♦ Feb. 21 at 8: "Swan Lake," "Episodes," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ Feb. 22 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Ancient Airs and Dances," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "Firebird," "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ Feb. 23 at 8: "Serenade," "Ancient Airs and Dances," and "Firebird." ♦ Feb. 24 at 3: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Episodes," and "The Concert." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570.)

MONTE BROWN DANCE
The company founded by Elisa Monte (the current co-director David Brown was part of the original troupe) celebrates its twentieth-anniversary season with two programs offering three premières and two revivals. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 12 at 7:30, Feb. 13-16 at 8, and Feb. 17 at 2 and 7:30.)

"PURIM"
The Györ National Ballet Theatre's adaptation of the Book of Esther (in which Esther marries the local king, a goy, who then spares her people certain death) is no exception to the general rule that story ballets are bad at the story part. But it's O.K. to be fuzzy on the plot details, because the Hungarian troupe's full-bodied movement and the Budapest Klezmer Band's accompanying tunes, which move from ominous to plaintive to joyful, do justice to the story's highs and lows (the wedding, the hanging, the beauty contest). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 19-22 at 8, Feb. 23 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 24 at 2 and 7:30.)

"BLISS"
Nicholas Leichter Dance presents four works, including "Free the Angels" and "Undertow." (92nd St. Y at the Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Feb. 13-14 and Feb. 16 at 8 and Feb. 17 at 2 and 8.)

"KEELY GARFIELD'S SINISTER SLAPSTICK"
Decked out in sparkly oversized wedding dresses, the three women in "Free Drinks for Ladies with Nuts" run with big flat-footed strides to their ceremony and stir up trouble. They help and harass each other in various guises—mommy, horsey, big sister, baby. "There's this idea that you'll hit a point when girlhood is all over, and carefreeness and madness are all over," says Keely Garfield. "That idea is kind of a bummer." The show also includes the Chaplinesque "Good Girl Daddy," featuring Lawrence Goldhuber as a daddy-cum-Keystone Cop, and the newly minted "My Sister Was a Refugee." (92nd St. Y at the Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Feb. 20-21 and Feb. 23 at 8 and Feb. 24 at 2 and 7.)

"GLIMMER"
Lava, Sarah East Johnson's troupe of six women and a pair of twin girls, all of whom have circus skills, look to American sports and recreation for ripe-for-disaster game plans: football, for example, where half the point is to undermine the other team's bone-cracking stratagems, or square dance, where a single misstep can ruin the whole exchange. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Feb. 15 at 8 and Feb. 16 at 4 and 8.)

"HUMAN BEHAVIORS"
The choreographers Brendan McCall and Keith Thompson offer one work apiece (McCall's "Outsider" and Thompson's "Suite Dean") and the title collaboration. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 15-16 at 8:30 and Feb. 17 at 7:30.)

"VALENTINE"
Three works on troubled love, choreographed by Sam Kim. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 21-24 at 8:30.)

"ENTER THE SEEN"
Miguel Gutierrez, formerly of the John Jasperse company, performs this evening-length work in his studio, in Bushwick; he blames his own Messiah complex for the out-of-the-way location: "Part of me believes that if everyone got to see dance this close up, they'd never watch MTV again." Spectators are free to move about the boxlike room as four fierce dancers bounce off the walls, slide along the floors, and stick their fingers in each other's noses—all to Jaime Fennelly's exuberant, quick-shifting electronic score. (Aqui the Bushwick, 249-55 Varet St., Brooklyn. For reservations, call 212-802-8245. Feb. 14 at 9, Feb. 15-16 and Feb. 22-23 at 8 and 10, and Feb. 17 and Feb. 24 at 7 and 9. Through March 17.)

VAROOM
The onomatopoeic troupe presents its first suite of works, "Sometimes It Goes Whoosh." (University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St. For reservations, call 718-282-7283. Feb. 21-23 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

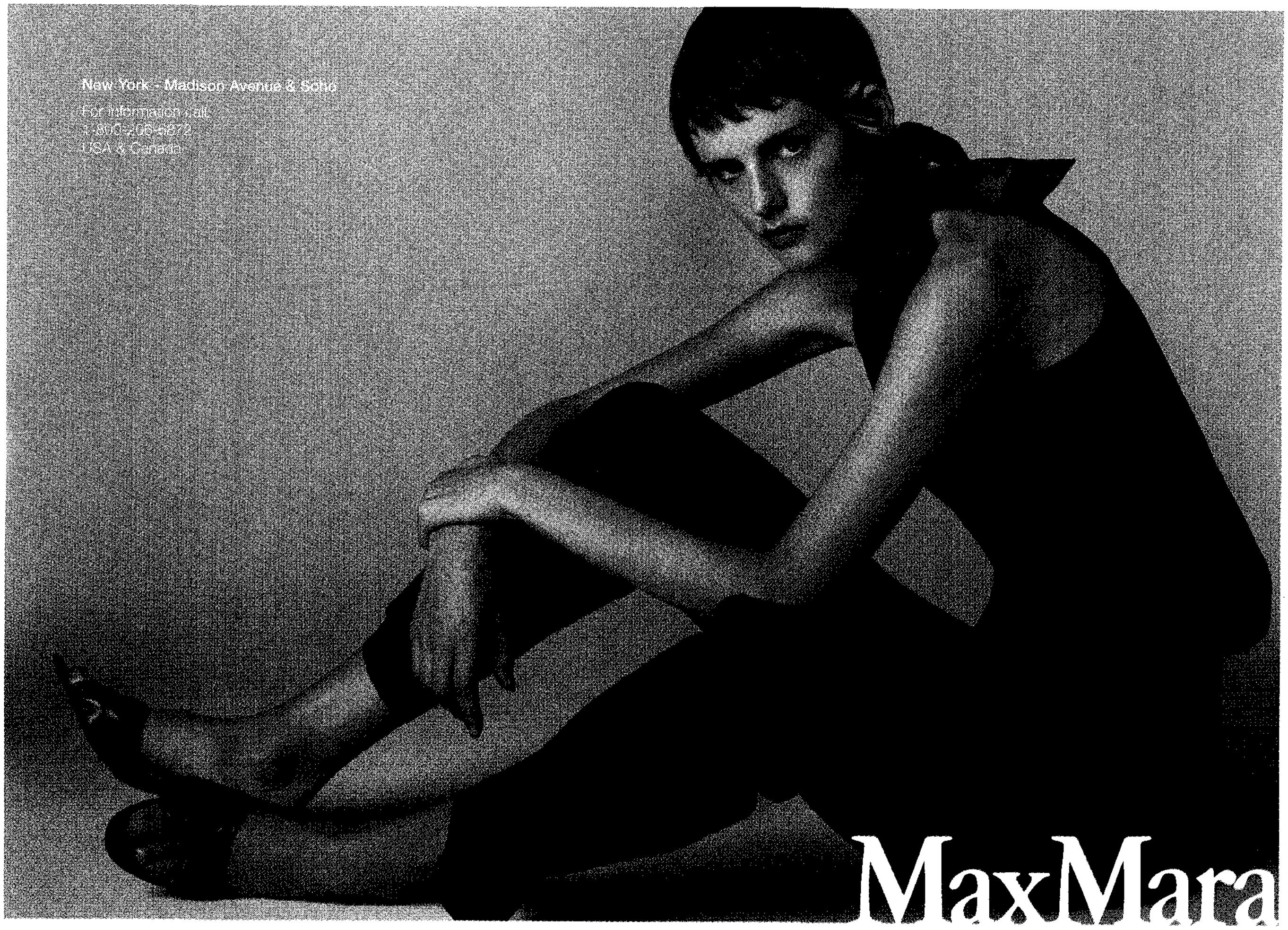
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
John Coltrane, whose influence has only grown stronger in the three and a half decades since his death, would have been seventy-six this year. The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra commemorates the great saxophonist on Feb. 14 and Feb. 16 with a program featuring **Pharoah Sanders,** the once volatile and now merely feisty saxophonist who played with Coltrane during his most blatantly experimental period. On Feb. 22-23, the L.C.J.O. celebrates the oversized music and personality of the sorely missed bassist, composer, and all-around iconoclast Charles Mingus in a concert featuring one of his star soloists, the alto saxophonist **Charles McPherson,** and the actor **Keith David.** (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. All shows at 8.)

JUDAS PRIEST
Many months ago, this tour was arranged to coincide with the release of the quickly forgotten Mark Wahlberg vehicle "Rock Star" (formerly titled "Metal God"), the film loosely based on this veteran British heavy-metal band's new lead singer, Ripper Owens, who was plucked from an obscure Judas Priest cover band to fill the mighty boots of the former front man Rob Halford. Owens's starry-eyed transformation from rock loser to genuine rock star was something all parties thought would make a great film. But Hollywood took too many liberties for the band's liking, so their music wasn't a part of the film. Meanwhile, the Priest soldiers on, with Owens still ripping out in front. With the unfortunately named **Anthrax.** (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Feb. 15 at 7:30.)

"THE CONGA KINGS"
New York City has moved to the underlying pulse of the conga drum for as long as there's been a Latin presence in the city. Three legendary figures, **Candido, Carlos (Patato) Valdes,** and **Giovanni Hildalgo** demonstrate how the union of hand and hide can produce sublime rhythms. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Feb. 15 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Feb. 15 at 8: Having just completed "Far from the Shamrock Shore: The Story of Irish-American Immigration Through Song," the ethnomusicologist, musician, and noted raconteur **Mick Moloney** celebrates the release of the book and a companion CD of the same name with a concert featuring the singer **Robbie O'Connell,** the fiddler **Dana Lyn,** the accordionist **Martin Reilly,** and others. As the singer Frank Harte once said, "Those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs." (LaGuardia High School Concert Hall, 100 Amsterdam Ave., between 64th and 65th Sts.) ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: The charismatic singer **Kandia Kouyate,** who is known back home in Mali as *la dangereuse* because her mesmerizing voice has been known to intoxicate men. (Haft Auditorium, Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St.) ♦ The **American Folk Roots Festival** brings in fiddlers, banjo players, and singers from far and wide. Feb. 22 at 8: The music of the Central Appalachian Mountains, with Eddie Bond, Charlie Walden, and Fletcher Bright. (Haft Auditorium.) Feb. 23 at 8: Cajun songs with Tony Ellis and Beausoleil, featuring Michael Doucet. (La Guardia High School.) Feb. 24 at 7: The bluegrass supergroup Longview and the West Kentucky thumb picker Eddie Pennington. (Haft Auditorium.) For more information about all the shows, call 545-7536.

CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG
With folksy political songs back in vogue, the aging and earnest Woodstockers of C.S.N.Y., who rose to fame with such Nixon-era protest fare as "Teach Your Children" and "Ohio" return to offer their classic four-part harmonies as a balm for a troubled nation. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Feb. 22-23 at 8.)



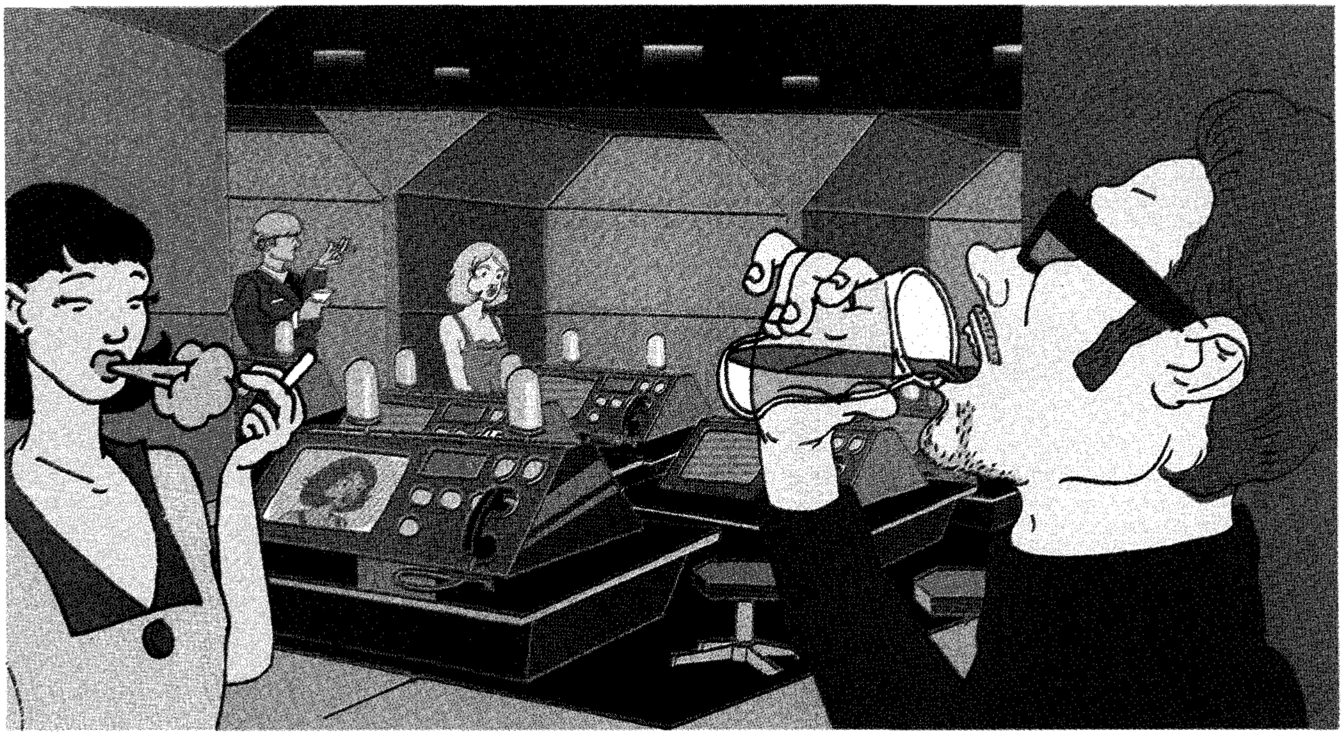
CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Feb. 14 and Feb. 16: The big, unabashed voice and even bigger emotions of **Betty Buckley.** Feb. 23: *Fast Folk* magazine celebrates its twentieth anniversary with performances by Jack Hardy, Noel Jones, Christine Lavin, Nikki Matheson, Richard Meyer, Tim Robinson, and Frank Tedesso.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Feb. 16: The front-porch ballads and lilting, whimsical waltzes of **Clem Snide.** Feb. 22: A night of techno-laden jam-band music with the **New Deal.** Feb. 26: Having survived battles against nuclear proliferation, the death penalty, and the Cuban trade embargo, the Georgia folk duo the **Indigo Girls** cruise into their second decade with a new record, "Become You."

CUTTING ROOM
19 W. 24th St. (691-1900)—Feb. 15: The former Bongos front man **Richard Barone,** in an evening titled "Who Needs a Heart Anyway? A Post-Valentine Recovery Concert."



Technology and cocktails converge in public at the Remote Lounge, a high-concept chat room in the East Village.

ZOHAR LAZAR

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 14: The lapidary, postmodern folk of **Jonatha Brooke.** Feb. 15-16: **Deep Banana Blackout** lays on the funk.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Feb. 13: The husky voice of Johnette Napolitano and her cohorts in the eclectic alternative trio **Concrete Blonde** roamed an indefinable middle ground between the L.A. punk rock they grew up with and accomplished, heartfelt pop. Beneath the hellcat exterior, Napolitano came armed with surprisingly sensitive songwriting skills. After the band dissolved in the mid-nineties following a slump, the trio's original lineup has reformed and released an acclaimed new album, "Group Therapy." Feb. 14: **Mike Doughty,** a onetime Knitting Factory doorman and former member of the jaggedly ironic combo Soul Coughing, returns triumphantly as a solo artist. Feb. 23: In a rare meeting of students and mentor, the celebrated noise-rock combo **Girls Against Boys** invade this downtown club with the founding No Wave scenester **Arto Lindsay.** Although he has moved on to more melodic, Brazilian-tinged pastures since his days fronting the skronk-happy avant-garde trio DNA, if Lindsay steps up to the mike and shows the new-jack noiseniks how it's properly done it will be a real treat.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Feb. 15: The members of the **Dirty Dozen Brass Band** are all-star Crescent City revisionists who put the stomp into everything they play, from Jelly Roll Morton to Michael Jackson. The Dozen are celebrating their twenty-fifth year of funk, with a forthcoming CD, "Medicated Magic," which features guest appearances by Dr. John, Olu Dara, and the astounding pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph. James Brown aside, the Brass Band's tuba player may be the hardest-working man in show business. Feb. 18: The faux-Brit pop of Vancouver's **New Pornographers.**

REMOTE LOUNGE
327 Bowery, near 2nd St. (228-0228)—Each table in this small but soon to be expanded high-tech voyeur's paradise is outfitted with a "cocktail console," which enables you to interact with people at other tables. Because there are no instructions, figuring out how to work the monitor, joystick-operated mini-camera, and telephone is half the fun. That, and catching the occasional young woman seeking the attention of other patrons by performing suggestive acts with her handset. And until you discover the frighteningly addictive ease of listening in on other conversations ("Do you trust me?," "If you need to see anything in the city, I can show you around," "Is this your first time?"), there's something almost romantic about a place where cyber-contact propels you to get up and introduce yourself face to face.

RODEO BAR
375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—Feb. 15: **Bill Kirchen,** enjoying a Grammy nomination for Best Country Instrumental Performance, raises a ruckus. Feb. 22: The madcap slide-guitar antics of **Hugh Pool.**

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-5252)—Feb. 15: The downtown aesthetes **Les Savy Fav** traffic in murky, guitar-based rock with angry-young-man leanings. Feb. 19: The **New Pornographers** (see Maxwell's).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through March 2: The eighteen-year-old college freshman and up-and-coming pop-and-jazz vocalist **Peter Cincotti.** Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Feb. 14-16: Sure, love can be beautiful, but it can also make you feel as though a rusty nail has been driven through your heart. And there's nobody better at expressing the duality of what makes the world go round than **Jimmy Scott.** The seventy-six-year-old survivor with the nakedly expressive voice cuts directly to the bone with tales of sweet and sour love. It's a perfect Valentine's Day engagement for emotional realists. Feb. 19-23: The **Hank Jones** trio. Some fifty years into an unassuming yet brilliant career, the pianist has become a contemporary version of his early model, Teddy Wilson: each silken phrase is guaranteed to be perfect in form and diction. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Feb. 17: The brightest hope for modern jazz singing—no, it's not Jane Monheit or even the chart-busting Diana Krall—is about to release a new album, "Belly of the Sun," and those who've followed the artistic zigzag of **Cassandra Wilson's** career know that whatever she attempts will delight. "Belly of the Sun" promises to be a rootsy affair, with elements of blues, R. & B., and pop, reflecting the incomparable singer's Southern background. Wilson, a stylist who has successfully interpreted the Monkees, will have few problems handling fare by the likes of Bob Dylan and Robert Johnson.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through Feb. 16: After years behind the scenes as a successful composer and producer, **Steve Tyrell** has reinvented himself as a jazzy crooner. The endearingly gruff-voiced singer has sterling taste in repertoire and jazz sidemen and the album sales to prove that this has all been more than a vanity project.

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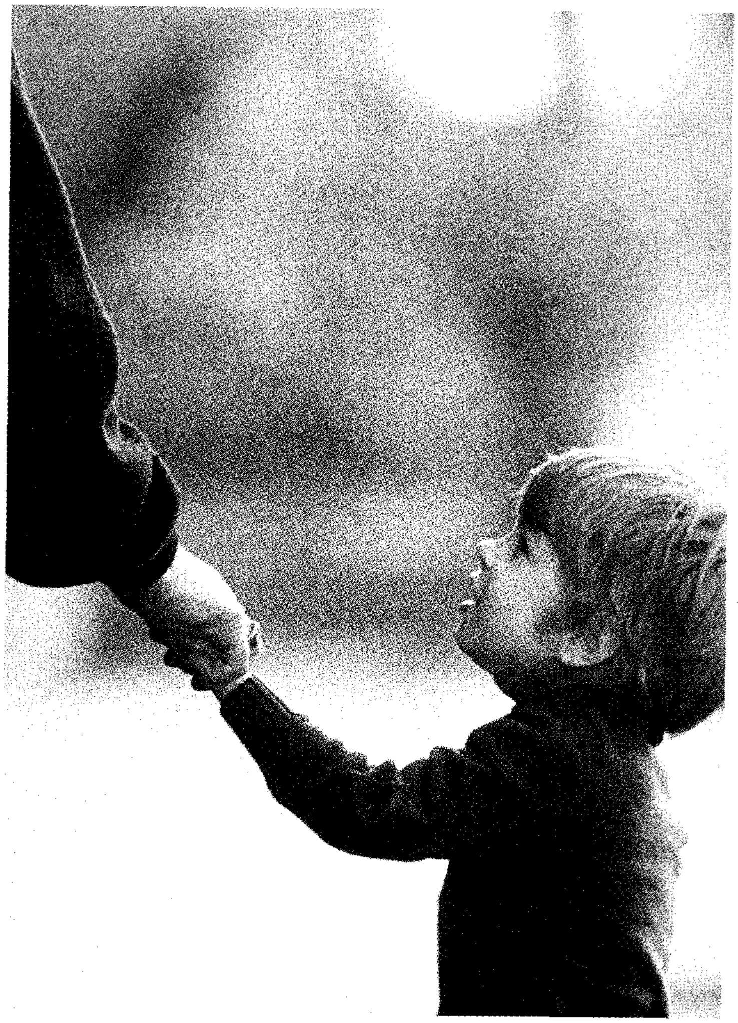

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IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Feb. 13-17: There are those who still swear that **Dee Dee Bridgewater** is the great lost jazz singer of her generation, and after seeing this dynamic performer you might come to believe them. Fondly remembered for her seventies stint with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis big band and her subsequent Tony-winning turn in "The Wiz," Bridgewater is an advocate for traditional vocalizing that doesn't stint on rhythmic excitement. Although residency in France hasn't helped her Stateside visibility any, Bridgewater's recent recordings, and her annual visits, all plead her case well. Feb. 19-24: It seems like yesterday that **Jacky Terrasson** was the toast of the town, but since he made his initial splash some ten years ago a host of smart and exciting young pianists emerged, essentially stealing this onetime Parisian mainstay's thunder. Terrasson, a willfully eccentric, occasionally mannered player, still hasn't found a comfortable identity all his own, but following him on his search has its pleasures. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul**.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—Feb. 15-16: Although he concentrates more on mainstream jazz these days than the R. & B.-inflected soul jazz with which he made his name, the tenor saxophonist and flutist **David (Fathead) Newman**, following a celebrated tenure with the Ray Charles band, has yet to lose the glorious grit from his earthy sound. When he starts to roughhouse with his horn, you can still hear every second of his decades of dues paying. Feb. 22-23: The **Steve Davis** quintet. The trombone may not be the sexiest instrument in jazz, but its wily charms still draw skilled players. Davis, one of the horn's more adept young masters, takes a break from Chick Corea's Origin band to step out on his own here.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Feb. 17: The **Clark Terry** quintet. There are only a few of them left, but Terry, eighty-one and still going strong, is among the chosen. A veteran of both the Count Basie and Duke Ellington bands, the old-school trumpeter and flugelhornist remembers a time when art and entertainment mingled freely; a funny man with a delightfully twisted sense of humor, he isn't the least bit shy about inducing a smile in the audience, or even an out-and-out belly laugh. Feb. 19-24: **Bruce Barth**, who first garnered attention in the neo-con finishing school of Terence Blanchard's band, is a sharp young pianist who speaks in a fluent sixties dialect. A blue-chip rhythm team of the bassist **Ugonna Okegwo** and the veteran Miles Davis drummer **Al Foster** will spice up Barth's début as a leader at the world's most prestigious jazz club. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

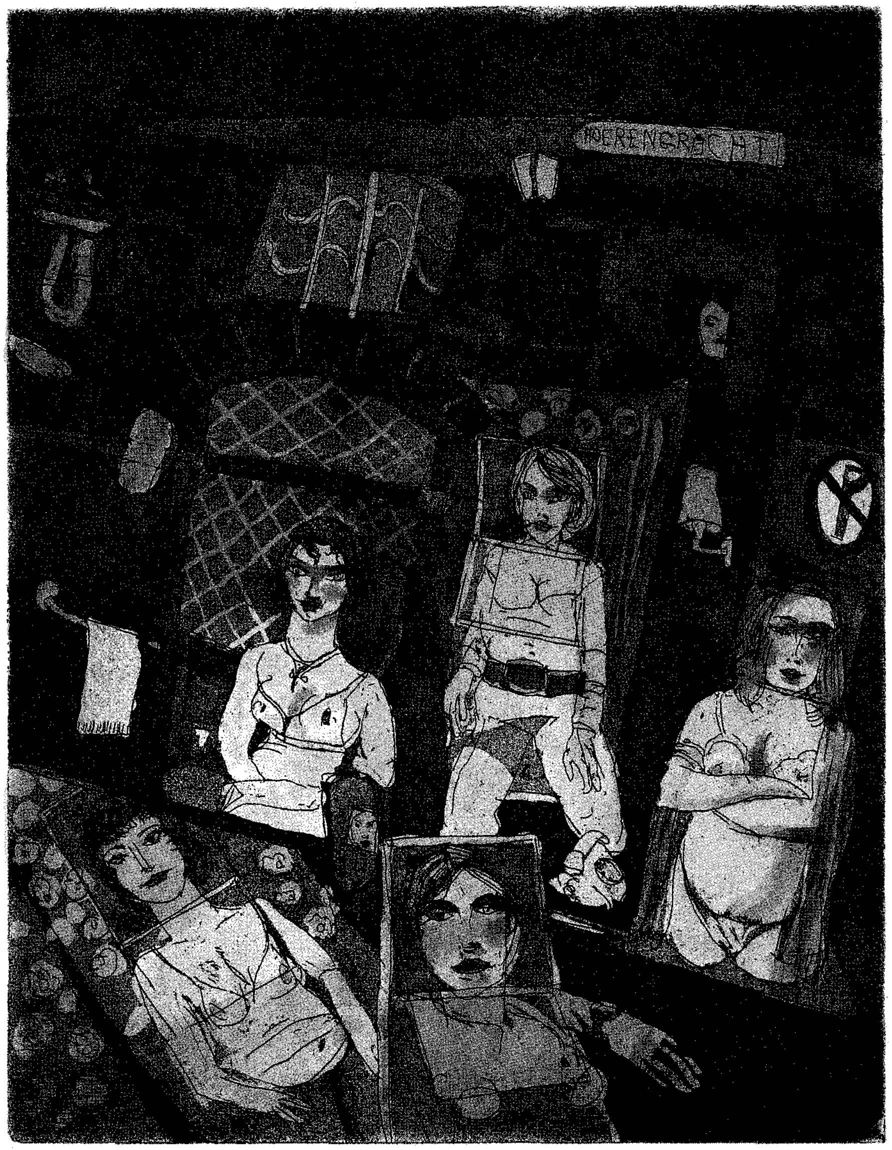
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Surrealism: Desire Unbound"** presents works by Miró, Ernst, Dali, Giacometti, and Man Ray, among others. Through May 5. ♦ **"Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy."** Through May 12. ♦ **"Earthly Bodies: Irving Penn's Nudes, 1949-50."** In 1949, soon after making a name for himself as a fashion photographer, Irving Penn began a sort of antifashion project. For two years, in his off-hours, he took close-up photographs of undressed, ample women. Cropped at the knees and armpits, the resulting torso-scapes are both voluptuous and spare. Some of the sixty prints on view could almost be mistaken for charcoal drawings: a whiplash line carves its way through an expanse of brilliant white paper and—presto!—summons up Willendorfian forms. Through April 21. ♦ If you find yourself hankering for a glimpse of piggeries, fold yards, church oaks, and hedgerows, a walk through **"Benjamin Brecknell: Rural England Through a Victorian Lens"** offers the equivalent of a picnic in a vanished countryside. Like most of the early photographers, Brecknell was a dedicated gentleman amateur. Setting up his enormous equipment and waiting patiently through half-hour exposure times, he recorded the farm buildings of his own country estate in Worcestershire, along with the occasional ruined castle or abbey. The results are lovably unspectacular—records of an ageless English landscape that seems to come straight out of "The Wind in the Willows" or Beatrix Potter. Through April 21. ♦ **"Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island."** Through Aug. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting."** Through May 21. ♦ The artist Ricci Albenda converts the lower level of the museum into three corridors, toying with perspective and playing spatial games in the gray area between architecture and sculpture. The first, a trompe-l'oeil mural of a corridor, greets viewers as they ride down the escalator. Around the corner, viewers find an actual corridor, the mirror image of the hallway depicted in the mural. A little further on, Albenda presents a shallow relief of the same image. Through May 21. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People."** Through March 3. ♦ **"Brazil: Body and Soul."** Through May 29. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—In 1949, Irving Penn offset the rigors of shooting ethereal fashion models by indulging his eye for fleshier subjects. (A show of those photographs is currently on view at the Met.) Fifty years later, the Rubenesque dancer Alexandra Beller posed for Penn for three related series now on view here. The most evocative of these were captured with three-second-long exposures; they suggest the agonizing distortion of Hans Bellmer or Francis Bacon, as the dancer sprouts a third breast and two more arms. Through May 12. ♦ Paul Pfeiffer ends his yearlong stint as the museum's artist-in-residence with a pair of new digital projects. The stronger of the two is a staccato loop depicting a melee on the basketball court after the Chicago Bulls' championship victory in 1996. The fluster of black hands frantically stroking a white-clad back looks simultaneously like an orgy and a mugging. The loop runs on the diminutive screen of a video camera, installed on a pedestal inside a glass vitrine. Though no doubt intended to underscore the fetishism of technology, it dilutes the impact of the image itself. Through Feb. 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)


ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Ed and Nancy Reddin Kienholz's red-light-district installation, at Pace Wildenstein.

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT PHILIP MORRIS
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—With little more than pipe cleaners and plastic chains, the artist Lucky DeBellevue transforms the atrium of Philip Morris into a mystical den. (The show was inspired in part by Khlysty, an occult Russian sect that counted Rasputin among its faithful.) A web of metallic gold thread is strung across the ceiling like a rag-district version of the Milky Way while a tentlike form in a starry-sky-blue palette graces the Forty-second Street entrance. At the far end of the atrium, in the café, a woven mass of pipe cleaners hangs over diners like a forest canopy. Through April 5. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"**Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum.**" Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—Hip-hop arrives at the institutional phase with "**One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art,**" an exhibition of thirty artists and artists' groups whose work derives from, pays homage to, or flirts with the sources of rap and hip-hop style. Though the choice of art form—music, fashion, polemic, attitude—depends on the individual artist, a tone of lightly ironic respect predominates, whether the work comes from elder statesmen such as David Hammons and Adrian Piper, eighties-era scenesters Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, or younger practitioners such as Chris Ofili, Nikki S. Lee, Bea Schlingelhoff, and Erik Parker. But don't come for the music: the galleries are curiously devoid of actual sound (unless there's a guard around to turn it on). Through May 26. (Open Wednesdays, noon to 9, and Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—In the past, the Belgian artist Wim Delvoye has made mosaic floors from sliced deli meats and soccer goals from stained glass. The latest expression of his penchant for shocking and self-mocking precision craftsmanship is "Cloaca," a high-performance laboratory whose sole purpose is to eat, digest, and eliminate. This intestinal machine, made up of gleaming stainless-steel platforms, glass vats, computer monitors, and hydraulic pumps, is fed twice daily with meals provided by SoHo restaurants. The necessary enzymes, bacteria, and acids are mixed in, and sometime later the inevitable product is extruded. Piero Manzoni's "Merda d'Artista" (1961) came sealed in a can. But times have changed, and this pile of art is made right in front of you. Through April 28. ♦ In the four years since Altoids, the breath-mint people, began purchasing art, packaging it in annual travelling exhibitions like this one, then donating the whole shebang to the New Museum, the Altoids imprimatur has become a curiously strong career boost for emerging artists. This year's twenty acquisitions include Yun-Fei Ji's traditional Chinese landscape painting infiltrated by wrecked pickup trucks and garroted prisoners, John Espinosa's startling sculpture of two jousting taxidermied deer, and Katrina Moorhead's dollhouse-size swimming pool painstakingly constructed from Styrofoam. If there's a unifying mood to the show, it's black humor, simultaneously geeky and whip smart. Through Feb. 17. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (864-4500)—Upon entering a room full of headless mannequins in Victorian costumes sewn from brightly colored African fabric, viewers may ask if the Studio Museum has launched a cross-cultural costume institute. But the London-born, Nigerian-raised artist Yinka Shonibare is less interested in seams and hems than in revealing the complexities of cultural identity. (The fabric, though African in design, was manufactured in the Netherlands for export to Great Britain.) Elsewhere, he skewers British class obsessions and racial tensions in a series of photographic tableaux (they suggest film stills) in which he stars as a dandy in a pink waistcoat, like the lone black actor in a Merchant Ivory production of "A Rake's Progress." Through March 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 6; Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

WILLEM DE KOONING
Twenty-seven mostly unfamiliar drawings, composed from 1937 to 1954, offer a vivid account of the Master's maturation. Stiff, stagey abstraction gives way to ever more assured and varied figuration. (It's good to revisit de Kooning's touchstone drawing circa 1938, the poignant "Self-Portrait with Imaginary Brother"—one of five works here from the estate of Saul Steinberg.) In stages, we see Arshile Gorky's liberating influence kick in. Figures distend with high-handed elegance. Abstraction resumes: fluent line has its way in Cubist space, grandly scaled in even the smallest picture. Then it's hello to the "Women," and his great cadenzas of explosive ambivalence. Through March 2. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400.)

ADAM DANT
In his New York début this young British cartoonist gives clown art an unusual lustre in small drawings that look like the spawn of Glen Baxter and Goya. Dant's work is full of art-historical references (witness the Piranesian "Clown Library" with Bozo-patterned parquet). But he also slips in some pop references ("My Heart Will Go On" takes its title from the "Titanic" theme song). The show's ten-foot-long centerpiece—a flowchart of domestic accidents and pratfalls—is clownless, but so slyly deadpan it suggests that Dant is graphic art's answer to Buster Keaton. Through March 2. (Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 861-7338.)

GORDON MATTA-CLARK
Matta-Clark (1943-78) managed to turn urban entropy against itself using a combination of the chainsaw, the idea, and the camera: he cut into abandoned buildings and took out enormous, elegantly geometric hunks of structural material. Eventually, all his brash and haunting "non-uments" were demolished, leaving nothing for posterity but films, photographs, and preparatory drawings. For those familiar only with his grainy photographs, the works on paper can come as a revelation. Exuberant clusters of arrows and tree forms in colored marker, gouged assemblages in which paper substitutes for paint or plaster, and studies for fantasy architecture betray a restless, humorous intelligence. Note his proposal—never realized—to excise giant circles from MOMA's façade. Through Feb. 16. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 517-8677.)

GRANDMA MOSES
If you find Norman Rockwell a trifle edgy, then this jam-packed show of work by the self-taught artist Anna Mary Robertson (a.k.a. Grandma) Moses may be just the ticket. Born in 1860, Moses didn't take up painting until her golden years. (Like Lana Turner, she was discovered in a drugstore, when her works were spied by a collector in 1938.) There is an undeniable charm to her homespun paintings, which transform panoramic vistas into crazy quilts dotted with sledding children and horse-drawn sleighs. But after nearly sixty pieces, viewers may feel as if they've eaten Forrest Gump's entire box of chocolates. Through March 16. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

"BEHIND THE SURREALIST CURTAIN: SEX, SENSUALITY, AND SILENCE"
These forty-two mostly pocket-size *objets* (collages, photographs, books, paintings, and some sculpture) address the Surrealists' favorite subject in a variety of registers, from the musingly visionary to the openly naughty. The collection here—

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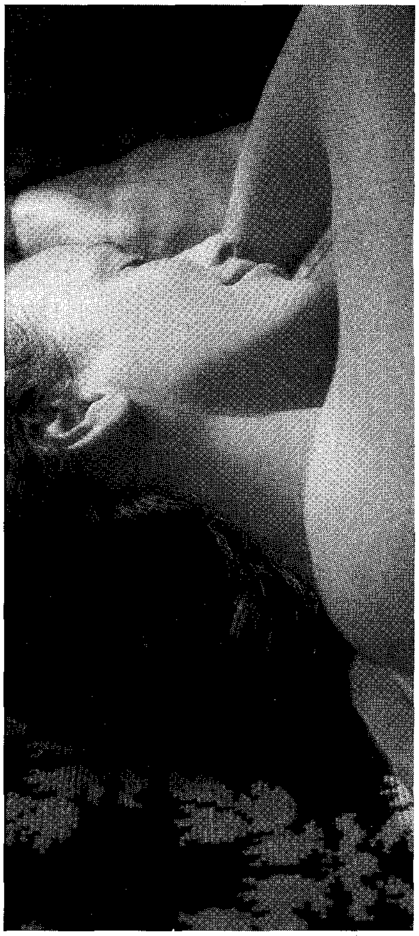

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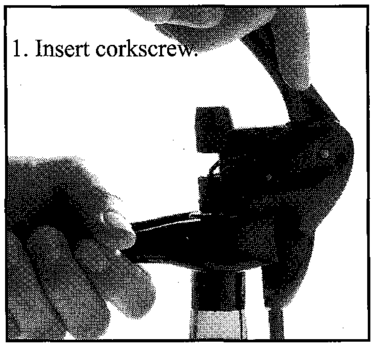
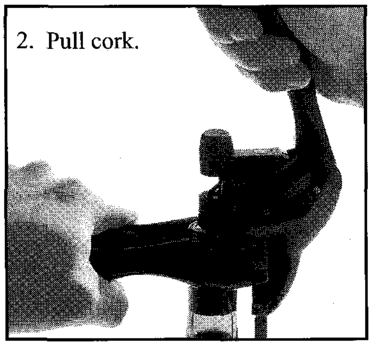


1. Insert corkscrew.



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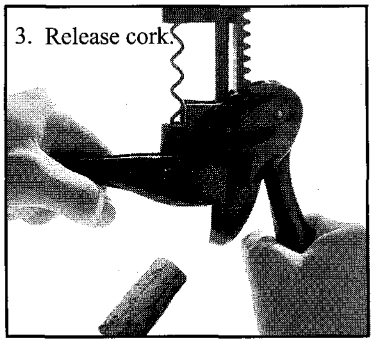

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which includes works by Bellmer, Ernst, Magritte, Picasso, Man Ray, Robert Matta, and Dorothea Tanning, among others—belongs to Ubu Gallery and Timothy Baum, who have also loaned generously to the Met's Surrealism show. Among the treats are a Cornell box of fairylike delicacy and a copy of "Prière de Toucher" ("Please Touch"), Duchamp's famous cover for the 1947 catalogue *Le Surréalisme*, featuring a soft-sculpture breast. Endearingly grubby, it attests to years of obedient response to the titular invitation. Through March 16. (Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.)

"THIN SKIN: THE FICKLE NATURE OF BUBBLES, SPHERES, AND INFLATABLE STRUCTURES"
From Chardin's soap bubbles to Arp's concretions, the sphere is a formal mainstay of visual art. Several works from the sixties (including Warhol's seemingly ubiquitous "Silver Clouds") provide a historical anchor, but this playful show emphasizes young artists and malleable materials. Viewers enter the gallery through Lee Boroson's dense cluster of inflated blue columns suspended from the ceiling through a billowy white "cloud" (together, the forms suggest a soft-sculpture rainstorm). Those who like their art uplifting will appreciate the photographs of a performance by Fiona Tan, who floats above a park in Amsterdam with the help of fifty red helium balloons. Through April 13. (AXA, 787 Seventh Ave., at 52nd St. 554-4818.)

Short List

EMILY CHENG
Winston Wachter Mayer, 39 E. 78th St. 327-2526. Through Feb. 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CLAY KETTER
Anyone who's seen a renovation in progress knows that the demolition stage is the most beautiful: on remaining walls, traces of old appliances, shelves, and moldings create ghostly, Mondrianesque compositions. Ketter has turned this effect into a career. Instead of oil paint and canvas, he uses contractors' supplies: ordinary wallboard, house paint, and siding, with screw anchors for color accents. At their most spare, the results are playfully evocative. More often, though, they settle for a realist bleakness: Hopperville, here we come. Through Feb. 16. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 627-1018.)

ED KIENHOLZ (1927-94) AND NANCY REDDIN KIENHOLZ
In the eighties, the husband-and-wife installation team set up a series of interconnected tableaux depicting Amsterdam's red-light district. In this re-creation, the visitor is invited to walk the nighttime streets of a fantasy neighborhood called the "Hoerengracht," or Whores' Canal—the artists' pun on the name of an unrelated Amsterdam landmark, the "Herengracht," or Gentlemen's Canal. The installation feels like an elaborate stage set, a warren of alleys, boudoirs, doorways, and peepholes populated by life-size female mannequins cast from live models. The work strikes a tone of elegiac voyeurism on an enticingly theatrical scale, but the subject—the appealingly tragic prostitute—is hardly an innovation. Through Feb. 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 929-7000.)

CY TWOMBLY
"Lepanto," this ravishing suite of twelve large canvases in acrylic, crayon, and graphite, may be Twombly's most satisfactory work. The subject does it. On a sunny day in 1571, European ships led by Venice defeated a fleet of the previously invincible Ottoman Empire, with historical consequences that are newly acute today. Twombly painted his commemoration for last year's Venice Biennale. The public theme chastens his often solipsistic style, anchoring Twombly's excruciated scribbles and daubs in references to oared boats and martial fire. Delicate blues read as masses of indifferent air and sea. It's as if the great battle had waited centuries for the right poet of Mediterranean light and pathos. "Lepanto" is fierce art. Through Feb. 26. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.)

Short List

GREG BOGIN
Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 752-2929. Through March 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

TIM HAWKINSON
Unlike the science-fair diversity of Hawkinson's previous exhibitions, this one consists of a single work, a vast improvised organ that could be, the gallery suggests, "the largest contemporary indoor sculpture yet created." Musically, Hawkinson's "Überorgan" is no match for its cousin over at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine—its booming foghorny tones are spine-tingling but hardly tuneful. As a visual spectacle and a feat of Rube Goldberg kitchen-cabinet engineering, however, it's an awe generator. Through March 30. (Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

"ALTERED"
Sam Kraus here applies her formula—"find, destroy, create, package"—to the technology of creativity: an electric typewriter and a tape recorder, torn up and packed in clear specimen jars and boxes. The act of dissection makes the bits and bolts seem as if they were once alive. In "A Shoe Is Born," it's footwear that we see coming to life. Glass jars hold scraps of distressed pumps which swarm, join, and grow in stages. They gain a sole at stage thirteen, an ankle strap at twenty-four, and a bow on top at twenty-seven. Through March 9. (Art in General, 79 Walker St. 219-0473.)

Short List

MARLENE MCCARTY
Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083. Through March 23.

PHOTOGRAPHY

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Cartier-Bresson credits early exposure to the Paris Surrealists as a key inspiration for his preference for shooting the "decisive moment"—an admission that can change the way you look at his work. In one picture, the head of a man reading a paper in Livorno is obscured by a huge ball of knotted fabric. In another, a man stares out a small window in a door painted with a number seven. The exhibition includes crowd pleasers like "Behind the Gare St.-Lazare, Paris" (1932) as well as sundry decisive moments from his stay in Mexico in the early thirties and a selection of his rarely seen nudes. Through March 6. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

PETER GARFIELD
The author of "Mobile Homes," a catalogue purporting to show the use of airborne buildings in photographs, has no plans to compete with that achievement in deception (he achieved the surreal effect by dangling toy houses from strings). His new body of work, "Objects with Potential," looks less like a trip to Oz than Kansas on a quiet day: white-coated yuppies stride purposefully through a complex of digitally multiplied aluminum buildings. Through March 2. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

HARRY WILKES
Panorama photography usually concentrates on the big picture, squeezing in as much as possible. But Wilkes enlists the format to give unexpected character to the quotidian. In one, the blunt end of a parking-lot guardrail takes on seriocomic grandeur as a Metro-North train breezes past. In another, the crenellated façade of an old-time Wall Street skyscraper looks like a row of pawns about

to challenge the bigger, newer buildings to a game of chess. Through Feb. 23. (American Space, 1305 Madison Ave., at 92nd St. 426-2879.)

"DREAM STREET"
This group show, with more than a hundred images by more than thirty different photographers shooting on at least four continents, is full of witty juxtapositions and curatorial surprises. Eikoh Hosoe's faux-moonlit nude is followed by an early Robert Doisneau of the artist Albert Dubout's magnified face. Manuel Alvarez Bravo's closeup of a bare-chested woman holding two glass eyes is countered by Graciela Iturbide's image of a boy looking up at an older woman who covers her eyes. Through March 23. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444.)

"DIEGO Y FRIDA"
Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo—more rebellious than Pollock and Krasner, louder than Stieglitz and O'Keeffe—rank high on the list of art history's power couples. Their story has all the elements of either a great novel or a *telenovela:* art, sex, success, revolution, tempestuous love. The photographs here, taken by such friends and acquaintances as Tina Modotti, Lola and Manuel Alvarez Bravo, and Lucien Bloch, provide a tender glimpse into what Kahlo's parents called a "marriage between an elephant and a dove." Through March 2. (Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side"** looks at Southeast Asia in the sixties and early seventies from the eyes of Vietcong soldiers, reporters, and state-sanctioned photographers. Buckets of dirt rise from cavernous tunnels; curvaceous beauties shoulder bolt-action rifles; surgeons, knee-deep in a swamp, prepare to operate under a mosquito-net tent. The accompanying video, which tracks the gathering of the show's images from aging Vietnamese vets, has much in common with "The Buena Vista Social Club," including the implication that whatever we can't win by force we can eventually package for entertainment. Through March 17. ♦ The photographs in **"Hidden Truths: Bloody Sunday 1972"** bear witness to the events of January 30, 1972, when the British Army killed thirteen Republican protesters and bystanders in Derry, Northern Ireland. Like the J.F.K. assassination, Bloody Sunday has spawned a field of study. A purportedly final government report on the subject failed to close the debate, and the snapshots shown here were among the evidence in a recent decision to reopen the inquiry. Viewers can come to their own conclusions about the deaths of Jackie Duddy (four photographs) and Barney McGuigan (two, and an image of a banner being dipped in a pool of blood after his body was removed). Through March 17. ♦ **"The First Snapshots,"** an exhibition of candids shot by amateur photographers in the eighteen-hundreds with the earliest Kodak cameras. Through March 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

EDWARD BURTYNSKY
Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 925-3500.
Through March 2.

WILLIAM EGGLESTON
Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St.
646-230-9610. Through March 16.

ROBERT FRANK
Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 929-7000.
Through Feb. 25.

VIKTOR KOLAR
Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051.
Through Feb. 23.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Feb. 21 at 10:15 A.M.: "Impressionist and Modern Art," a sale devoted to paintings and sculpture (mostly at moderate prices) by such artists as Vlaminck, Maillol, Klimt, and Degas ("Jockey," a drawing estimated to bring up to forty thousand dollars). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Feb. 13 at 10 A.M. and 2: "Fine American Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture." ♦ Feb. 19 at 10 A.M. and 2: Prints from the nineteenth century to the present, including works by Renoir, Whistler, Lichtenstein, and Sol LeWitt. ♦ Feb. 19 at 4: A sale of photographs. ♦ Feb. 20 at 10 A.M.: "Impressionist and Modern Art." ♦ Feb. 20 at 2: An auction of postwar and contemporary art works. ♦ Feb. 26 at 10 A.M.: Two paintings by Robert Salmon highlight a sale of maritime art works, which also features a selection of ship models and instruments. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

SWANN
Feb. 19 at 10:30 A.M.: An exceptional sale of fine photographs. The hundred lots contain a number of iconic images, including an early print of Alfred Eisenstaedt's "Opening, La Scala," Ruth Bernhard's "Nude in a Box—Reclining," and W. Eugene Smith's haunting "Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath." Also included are works by such artists as Lange, Rodchenko, Man Ray, and August Sander (a portrait of Richard Strauss, signed by the composer). (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

THE ARMORY SHOW
The international fair of contemporary art, featuring a selection of paintings, videos, prints, and other art works, exhibited by a hundred and fifty leading galleries. (Piers 88 and 90, Twelfth Ave. at 48th and 50th Sts. 645-6440. Feb. 21-25.)

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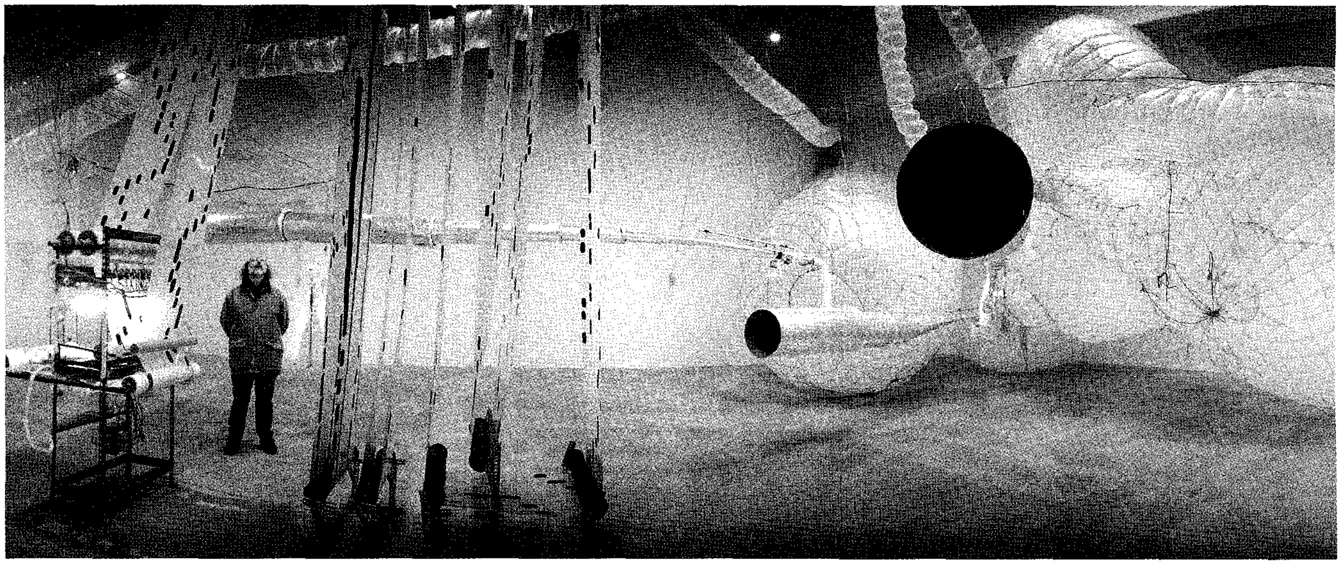
THE ART SHOW
A show given to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Art Dealers Association of America, with seventy American galleries featuring art works in all genres. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 940-8925. Feb. 21-25.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Met's revival of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** conducted by Donald Runnicles, is cause for joy. The concept behind Jonathan Miller's 1998 production, nimbly restaged by Robin Guarino, is essentially simple: make the characters seem in every way alive, and let Mozart's themes of class conflict and sexual indiscretion take care of themselves. Ferruccio Furlanetto, rich-voiced and theatrically savvy, takes the title role; also with Melanie Diener, Rebecca Evans, Angelika Kirchschlager, and Michele Pertusi. (Feb. 13 and Feb. 19 at 7:30 and Feb. 16 and Feb. 23 at 8.) ♦ Valery Gergiev conducts the Met première of Prokofiev's **"War and Peace,"** a co-production with St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre directed by Andrei Konchalovsky. The exceptionally large cast (many of whom are making their débuts) is led by Anna Netrebko, Ekaterina Semenchuk, Elena Obraztsova, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Gegam Grigorian, Samuel Ramey, Vassily Gerello, and John Cheek. (Feb. 14, Feb. 18, Feb. 21, and Feb. 26 at 7:30.) ♦ **"Tosca,"** with Sylvie Valayre, Francisco Casanova, and James Morris; Daniel Oren conducts. (Feb. 15 at 8.) ♦ The last performance this season of **"La Bohème,"** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Ainhoa Arteta, Ramón Vargas, and Bruno Caproni; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 16 at 1:30.) ♦ Robert Carsen's spare and affecting production of Tchaikovsky's **"Eugene Onegin"** returns for two final performances. The cast includes Solveig Kringelborn, Katarina Karnéus, Marcello Giordani, Thomas Hampson, and Robert Lloyd; Vladimir Jurowski. (Feb. 20 at 8 and Feb. 23 at 1:30.) ♦ The first performances this season of **"Rigoletto,"** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Denyce Graves, Marcelo Álvarez, Juan Pons, and Robert Lloyd; the conductor Marco Guidarini makes his début. (Feb. 22 and Feb. 25 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)



Tim Hawkinson's installation "Überorgan," a multiroom musical instrument with bagpipelike foghorn tones, at Ace.

GUS POWELL

DICAPO OPERA
Elaine Rinaldi conducts a cast of sixty-five in a new production of **"Street Scene,"** Kurt Weill's American opera with lyrics by Langston Hughes. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. Feb. 15-16 and Feb. 22-23 at 8 and Feb. 17 and Feb. 24 at 4.)

AMATO OPERA
The feisty East Village chamber-opera company continues its run of Donizetti's comedy **"L'Elisir d'Amore."** (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Feb. 16 and Feb. 23 at 7:30 and Feb. 17 and Feb. 24 at 2:30.)

"OPERA TAKES THE A TRAIN"
Opera Ebony presents an evening of scenes from operas and musicals by such composers as Mozart, Handel, and Harold Arlen. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 23 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
When Ravel made his classic orchestration of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" he transformed a rather raw and craggy piano suite into a sequence of sumptuous French miniatures. Sergei Gorchakov's 1954 orchestration may be far less known than the Ravel, but it succeeds in bringing the piece back to its vital Russian roots. It is a favorite of Kurt Masur, who conducts the work along with music by Dutilleux and Schubert (the "Unfinished" Symphony). (Feb. 15 at 8, Feb. 16 at 2, and Feb. 19 at 7:30.) ♦ The German conductor Ingo Metzmacher makes his début, leading music by Hartmann, Strauss ("Ein Heldenleben"), and Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-Flat Major, with Richard Goode, returning to the Philharmonic after an absence of nine years). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Feb. 21 and Feb. 23 at 8, Feb. 22 at 11 A.M., and Feb. 26 at 7:30.)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Maverick programming has been the hallmark of Michael Tilson Thomas's tenure with this orchestra, from which he coaxes a bright and smoothed-out Left Coast sound. Feb. 13 at 8: Schoenberg's "Five Pieces for Orchestra" and "Theme and Variations," along with Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" (with the tenor Michael Schade and the baritone Thomas Hampson). ♦ Feb. 14 at 8: Music by two unruly geniuses, Berlioz (including Three Scenes from "Roméo et Juliette") and Ives (the Symphony No. 4, a glorious American colossus, with the Voices of Ascension choir). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

MUNICH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
James Levine takes up the music directorship of the Boston Symphony full time in 2004, but in the meantime he'll enjoy two more seasons with his Munich ensemble, continuing his explorations of contemporary music and the German classics. Feb. 15 at 8: Mahler's Symphony No. 4 (with the soprano Heidi Grant Murphy) and Schubert's Symphony No. 9 in C Major (the "Great"). ♦ Feb. 16 at 8: Music by Strauss, Mozart (the Symphony No. 39 in E-Flat Major), John Harbison, and Schoenberg (the Piano Concerto, with Peter Serkin). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2: Symphonies by Brahms (the Fourth) and Beethoven (the Seventh), along with Ives's majestic "Three Places in New England" and Ligeti's "Lontano." (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

POMERIUM: "THE LITURGY RESTORED"
Miller Theatre, continuing its concert series showcasing English Catholic music from the reign of Mary I, presents Alexander Blachly's noted early-music vocal ensemble in a program of Tallis, White, Parsons, and Tye. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 16 at 7.)

WARSAW PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Now in its hundredth season, the orchestra comes to Avery Fisher Hall for an afternoon of music by Chopin (the Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, with Ingrid Fliter, a recent winner of the Chopin Competition) and Tchaikovsky (the Fifth Symphony). Kazimierz Kord conducts. (721-6500. Feb. 17 at 3.)

EOS ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Sheffer conducts "America Singing Songs," a program including music by Barber ("Knoxville: Summer of 1915," with the soprano Pamela Armstrong), Thomson, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Jake Heggie (a première). (Ethical Culture Society Concert Hall, 2 W. 64th St. 691-6415. Feb. 21 at 8.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY
Gotham's outstanding orchestra for teen-age players, conducted by Mischa Santora, performs Brahms's Symphony No. 1, concert arias by Mozart and Strauss (with the soprano Jessica Jones), and a new work by the young composer Anthony Cheung ("Serendipitous Scenes"). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 24 at 2.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Roberto Abbado leads the orchestra in music by Prokofiev, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky (the Violin Concerto, with Vadim Repin). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 26 at 8.)

RECITALS

JON DEAK
Deak is known not only for his double-bass playing—he's associate principal in the New York Philharmonic—but as a composer of captivating pieces for his instrument. He performs a program of music by Jacob Druckman, Muhal Richard Abrams, and himself, with the bass-baritone Thomas Buckner and other musicians. (Merkin Concert Hall. 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Feb. 13 at 8.)

SONGS FOR ST. VALENTINE'S DAY
Joy in Singing, the organization that promotes young singers and American songs, sponsors a

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concert of music by Christopher Berg and Celius Dougherty, mostly about love, featuring (among others) the baritone Scott Murphree and the pianist Israel Gursky. (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. Feb. 14 at 6. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
Two programs of Brahms, performed by the pianist Naum Grubert, the violist Toby Hoffman, and others. Feb. 14-15 at 7:30: The Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major, the String Quartet in C Minor, and the Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major. ♦ Feb. 16 at 7:30 and Feb. 17 at 4: Four Intermezzi for Piano Solo, the String Quartet in A Minor, and the Piano Quartet No. 1 in A Major. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Feb. 16 at 8: The Guarneri Quartet presents quartets by Beethoven and Mendelssohn, along with Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 2 (with Peter Frankl). ♦ Feb. 20 at 8: Every once in a while, the violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg brings together a group of old friends—including the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott and the cellist Eric Kim—to play chamber music. For their latest gathering, the group performs music by Beethoven, Brahms, and Dvořák (the Piano Quintet in A Major). ♦ Feb. 22 at 8: The touring extension of the summer festival Musicians from Marlboro presents music by Debussy and Schubert (the grand Octet for Woodwinds and Strings). The performers include the cellist David Soyer. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
Feb. 16 at 8: The pianist Vladimir Feltsman performs music by Schumann, including "Kreisleriana" and "Kinderszenen." ♦ Feb. 23 at 8: The Tokyo String Quartet performs music by Brahms (the two String Sextets, with members of the Ying Quartet) and the première of a quartet by Joan Tower. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500.)

NORTH/SOUTH CONSONANCE
"Practice in the Art of Elocution," an opera satire by Jack Beeson (a master of the form), shares the program with Stravinsky's "The Soldier's Tale"; the musicians include the pianist Marc Peloquin and the soprano Lynne Vardaman. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Feb. 17 at 3. No tickets required.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
A program of music by Beethoven and Hummel (the Septet in D Minor), featuring the pianist Adam Neiman and the flutist Barry Crawford. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Feb. 19 at 2 and 8.)

MILLER THEATRE
Two evenings of music by women; pieces by Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-53), who is rapidly taking a place next to Charles Ives as a key American modernist, are featured on both programs. Feb. 19 at 8: "Piano on the Edge," music for the keyboard by Galina Ustvolskaya, Chen Yi, and others, played by Jenny Lin. ♦ Feb. 22 at 8: The composer-pianist Beata Moon presents her eponymous ensemble—with the violinist Lara St. John, a fiery player, as guest artist—in a program including music by Anne LeBaron, Tania León, and Julia Wolfe. (Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799.)

BARBARA BONNEY
The soprano brings her agile charm to music by Schubert, Liszt, and Schumann ("Dichterliebe"); the pianist is Malcolm Martineau. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 20 at 7:30.)

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER BAND
Elaine Comparone leads, from the harpsichord, an evening of music from Italy, including several arias by Monteverdi (with a guest, the soprano Lucy Shelton) and concertos by Vivaldi. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Feb. 20 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society presents an evening with the Miami String Quartet, a young ensemble that combines technical assurance with a genuine Romantic style, in music by Haydn, Ginastera, and Dvořák (the Sextet in A Major, with the violist Jaime Laredo and the cellist Sharon Robinson helping out). (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Feb. 20 at 8.)

GRACE BUMBRY
In a tribute to her mentor, Lotte Lehmann, the mezzo-soprano makes her first New York recital appearance in ten years, performing songs by Schubert, Brahms, Liszt, Strauss, and Berlioz, with the pianist Helmut Deutsch. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Feb. 21 at 8.)

STRING QUARTETS BY EZRA LADERMAN
Laderman, a veteran American composer of impeccable craft, maintains a devotion to the art of quartet writing that harks back to the tradition of Haydn and Bartók. While his works have been performed by such ensembles as the Tokyo, Concord, and Juilliard, he has long enjoyed the patronage of the Cassatt Quartet, an all-female group whose playing abounds with energy and color. They perform his Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Quartets—designed as a cycle—at the Kosciuszko Foundation. (15 E. 65th St. 734-2130. Feb. 21 at 8.)

THE PIANO SONATAS OF GEORGE ANTHEIL
Antheil (1900-59) may have been the self-styled bad boy of American music, but his manuscripts are stored in a most respectable place, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Guy Livingston plays the sonatas on site, which have crazy titles like "Airplane Sonata" and "Sonata Sauvage." (Bruno Walter Auditorium, Lincoln Center. Feb. 23 at 3. No tickets required.)

GARRICK OHLSSON
An audacious program from a powerhouse pianist, who performs two works by John Adams—the minimalist classic "China Gates" and the première of "American Berserk"—along with music by Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff (the towering Sonata No. 2 in B-Flat Minor) and Rachmaninoff arrangements of Mendelssohn and Bach. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 25 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Feb. 19 at 6: The actors Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis join the author John Edgar Wideman, the storytelling troupe Church of the Livin' Womb, and others, for a reading from "Every Tongue Got to Confess," the recently discovered volume of folklore collected by Zora Neale Hurston. (Donnell Library Center, 20 W. 53rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 20 at 7:30: The journalist Blake Eskin offers selections from "A Life in Pieces," his retelling of the story of the discredited Holocaust memoirist Binjamin Wilkomirski. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 21 at 7: The amateur pugilist and writer Robert Anasi reads from his book about life inside the ring, "The Gloves: A Boxing Chronicle." (Corner Bookstore, Madison Ave. at 93rd St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
Feb. 13 at 7:30: Three attorneys—Joan Gibbs, of the Medgar Evers College Center for Law and Social Justice, Abdeen Jabara, formerly the president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and Michael Ratner, of the Center for Constitutional Rights—discuss civil liberties in a post-September 11th world. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. 242-4201.) ♦ Feb. 21 at 3: In conjunction with the Art Show at the 7th Regiment Armory, the curator Robert Storr interviews the artist Elizabeth Murray. (Park Ave. at 67th St. For more information, call 940-8925.) ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: The novelists Robert Stone, Denis Johnson, and Jim Shepard join a trio of psychoanalysts for a discussion about being creative after the attacks on the World Trade Center, titled "The Apocalyptic Imagination: Daydreaming in an Era of Nightmares." (Farkas Auditorium, N.Y.U. School of Medicine, 550 First Ave., between 30th and 33rd Sts. For more information, call 737-2055.) ♦ Feb. 26 at 7: Todd Hanson and Carol Kolb, of *The Onion*, Sarah Vowell, of "This American Life," and Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine and a contributor to *McSweeney's*, consider the use and function of humor in storytelling. (Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Sq. S. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

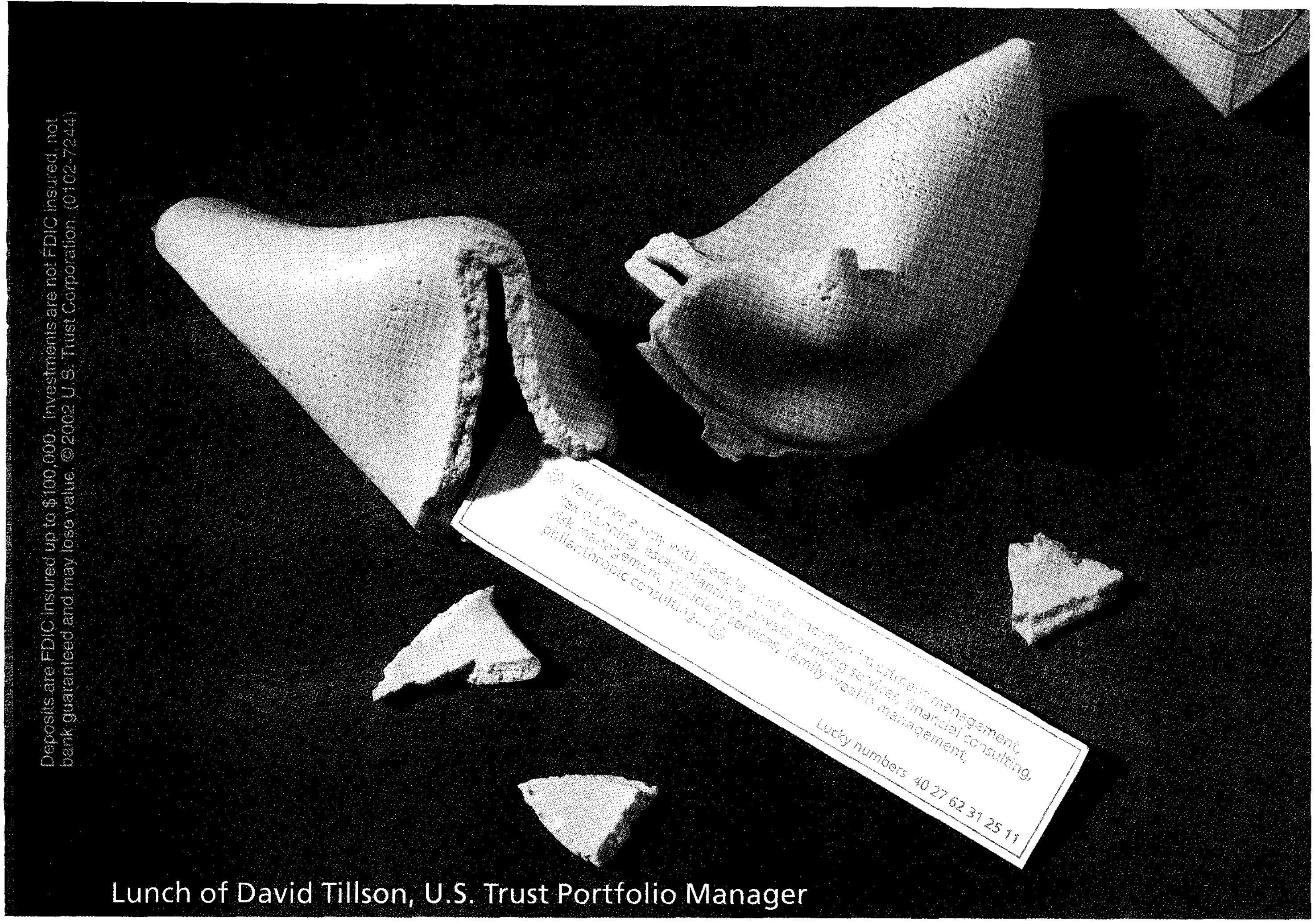
Into Africa

This month, the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, in Queens, mounts an exhibition called "The Short Century," in which the story of postcolonial Africa is told through the continent's painting, photography, poster art, record covers, and other media. The accompanying volume, **THE SHORT CENTURY: INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA, 1945-1994** (Prestel), edited by Okwui Enwezor, provides eye-opening encounters with Africa's unsung heroes of modern art, including Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, whose playful, text-heavy portraits of Brezhnev, Reagan, Pope John Paul II, and Nelson Mandela are like trading cards for the eighties. Bouabré's work suggests that African art has been as influenced by European modernism as Picasso was once influenced by "primitive" African sculpture and masks; as the Nigerian art historian Chika Okeke reminds us, Africa, as well as its art, has always been "open to the rest of the world, of which it sees itself as an essential part."

Okeke's point is borne out by Ernie Wolfe III's **EXTREME CANVAS** (Dilettante), a collection of handmade Ghanaian movie posters with commentary from the likes of Clive Barker, Gus Van Sant, and LeVar Burton. Painted on canvas flour sacks, these charmingly lowbrow, and slightly deranged, creations evoke both Marvel Comics and William Blake as they advertise "Children of the Corn III," "The Terminator," and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." In the eyes of such artists as Death Is Wonder and Heavy J., Hollywood is merely a jumping-off point: Schwarzenegger is an opportunity to depict rippling musculature, while "Cujo" inspires bizarre canines that have no connection to the movie itself. Like the art of "The Short Century," these contemporary African expressions transcend the culture clashes that created them.

—*Mark Rozzo*

STEPHEN SAVAGE



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Lunch of David Tillson, U.S. Trust Portfolio Manager

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MOVIES OPENING

BEHIND THE SUN
Two Brazilian families feud over disputed rangeland in a drama directed by Walter Salles ("Central Station"). In Portuguese. Opening Feb. 22.

BIG BAD LOVE
Arliss Howard directed this drama in which he plays a Vietnam veteran who returns to his native Mississippi and tries to become a novelist. With Debra Winger. Opening Feb. 22.

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Charlotte Rampling as Madame Lyubov and Alan Bates as Gaev in an adaptation of Chekhov's play. Michael Cacoyannis ("Zorba the Greek") directed. Opening Feb. 22.

CROSSROADS
A Georgia teen-ager (Britney Spears) travels cross-country to fulfill her musical dreams in a road movie directed by Tamra Davis. Opening Feb. 15.

DRAGONFLY
A supernatural thriller with Kevin Costner as a doctor who believes that his deceased wife is sending him messages. Opening Feb. 22.

HART'S WAR
Gregory Hoblit's military drama about the trial of an American soldier inside a German P.O.W. camp during the Second World War. The cast includes Bruce Willis, Colin Farrell, and Terrence Howard. Opening Feb. 15.

HOW TO KILL YOUR NEIGHBOR'S DOG
A Los Angeles playwright (Kenneth Branagh) struggles with writer's block in a dark comedy directed by Michael Kalesniko. Opening Feb. 22.

IRIS
A dramatization of the life of Iris Murdoch written and directed by Richard Eyre. With Judi Dench, Jim Broadbent, Kate Winslet, and Hugh Bonneville. Opening Feb. 15.

JOHN Q
Nick Cassavetes directed this thriller with Denzel Washington as a man who takes an emergency room hostage in order to get his son a heart transplant. The cast includes Anne Heche and Robert Duvall. Opening Feb. 15.

LAST ORDERS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 15.

MARYAM
The story of an Iranian-American teen-ager (Mariam Parris) living with her family in New Jersey during the 1979 hostage crisis. Written and directed by Ramin Serry. Opening Feb. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

MEAN MACHINE
An English remake of "The Longest Yard," with Vinnie Jones as an ex-soccer star who leads a team of inmates in a match against their prison guards. Barry Skolnick directed. Opening Feb. 22.

MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING
A documentary by Michael Rubbo ("Waiting for Fidel") that investigates whether or not Shakespeare wrote the plays credited to him. Opening Feb. 13. (Film Forum.)

MONSOON WEDDING
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 22.

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED
A vampire movie adapted from the novel by Anne Rice with Stuart Townsend taking on the role of Lestat. Also with Aaliyah and Marguerite Moreau. Opening Feb. 22.

RETURN TO NEVER LAND
An animated sequel to the classic tale of the boy who never grows up. Opening Feb. 15.

SCRATCH
Doug Pray directed this documentary about hip-hop d.j.s. Opening Feb. 15.

SUPER TROOPERS
The five-man comedy group Broken Lizard plays a squad of overzealous Vermont state troopers in a comedy they wrote and directed. Opening Feb. 15.

WENDIGO
The writer-director Larry Fessenden's latest horror film, the story of a Manhattan couple whose winter weekend in upstate New York goes terribly awry. Opening Feb. 15. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

A BEAUTIFUL MIND
If you think the title stinks, try the movie. Russell Crowe plays John Nash, a real-life mathematician whose most radical work was produced in his early twenties and who shared the 1994 Nobel Prize for Economics at the age of sixty-six. In between lay years of darkness, during which Nash was assailed by paranoid schizophrenia. When it comes to the delicate matter of his delusions, this earnest movie, written by Akiva Goldsman and directed by Ron Howard, pulls a flagrant scam: whole characters and episodes are presented as urgently authentic, only to be revealed as figments of a cracked imagination. Crowe pulls out the stops, but he looks too bullish and controlled for such a pitiable victim. The movie grinds on forever until it bumps into redemption; the best reason to stay with it is Jennifer Connelly, who smolders and suffers to perfection as Nash's weary wife. Math skills not required.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/7/02.) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BIRTHDAY GIRL
A cockamamie story about a Russian bride (Nicole Kidman), a shlumpy English bank clerk (Ben Chaplin) who acquires her over the Internet, and two wild and crazy guys (Mathieu Kassovitz and Vincent Cassel), Russian friends of the bride, who show up in England and terrorize the bank clerk. Kidman is on fire in her "Moulin Rouge," kitten-with-a-whip mode, but Chaplin is hopeless. He never really comes alive; he never even closes his mouth and stops staring in disbelief. The material might have been charming if it had been handled with the right touch, but the director, Jez Butterworth, gets menacing and nasty when the laughs should come. Written by Butterworth and his brother Tom.—*David Denby* (Cinema 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

BLACK HAWK DOWN
This account of the ill-fated 1993 Special Forces action in Mogadishu, Somalia, which resulted in the death of eighteen Americans, is exceptionally violent but also truthful to the pain and disorder of battle. It's very clearly directed by Ridley Scott, who allows you to see where the different groups of men are fighting in relation to one another. The movie suggests that despite the casualties the battle was not a total failure but rather a demonstration of strength—the men were killed, in part, because they stayed in the danger zone to rescue survivors from the two helicopters that were shot down. With Sam Shepard, Tom Sizemore, and Josh Hartnett, all submerging themselves in the business at hand. Ken Nolan, adapting Mark Bowden's book, achieves the right tone of matter-of-factness, resolution, and defiance.—*D.D.* (12/24 & 31/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF
A genre-busting treat—part costume drama, part martial-arts horror film—concerning a ferocious, man-eating beast that roams the mountains of eighteenth-century France. The film, directed energetically by Christophe Gans, gets the jolts started with the gruesome death of a peasant girl, which is imaginatively taken from the opening scene of "Jaws." Gans casts his film with gorgeous performers (Samuel Le Bihan as the naturalist sent to investigate, Monica Bellucci as a mysterious courtesan), and his eye-candy sets and thoroughly fruity ideas pack the film with enough outré juxtapositions to make Baz Luhrmann blush. In French.—*Bruce Diones* (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

BURDEN OF DREAMS
Les Blank's 1982 feature-length documentary on the making of Werner Herzog's "Fitzcarraldo" has an unusual effect: it makes "Fitzcarraldo" crumble in the memory—it merges with it. Blank shows more sensitivity in his shots of the Peruvian Indians than Herzog does, and Blank's footage of Herzog himself, standing and addressing the camera (though with eyes averted), is stronger than anything in the movie being made. In these monologues, Herzog seems almost priggish in his dissociation from his own filmmaking methods; he speaks of the mammoth physical challenges he sets up as if they had been imposed on him—as if he had been cursed.—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 21 and Feb. 23-24.)

GOSFORD PARK
This Agatha Christie-style houseparty murder mystery, set in 1932, plants itself deep into social reality and achieves the kind of candor about class and sex that Christie would never have been capable of. The brilliant screenplay was written by Julian Fellowes. Robert Altman directs an enormous cast with lightness and speed and a masterly ability to pull the many little pieces of intrigue together into a coherent whole. Casually, the movie chronicles the end of the rigid British class system and the liberation of the working class through popular entertainment. The once-in-a-lifetime cast includes Michael Gambon, Kristin Scott Thomas, Maggie Smith, Jeremy Northam, and Charles Dance as the swells, and Helen Mirren, Eileen Atkins, Alan Bates, Clive Owen, and Emily Watson as the servants. Bob Balaban plays a Hollywood producer of Charlie Chan mysteries, and Ryan Phillippe is his valet, a cherub-faced erotic toy that anyone can play with.—*D.D.* (1/14/02) (Chelsea West, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

A GREAT DAY IN HARLEM
A funny, moving, altogether miraculous 1994 documentary made by Jean Bach about how fifty-eight famous, near-famous, and not yet famous jazz musicians came to be photographed by Art Kane for *Esquire* in front of a brownstone on East 126th Street one morning in August of 1958. The movie, just under an hour long, is a mercurial mix of brief interviews with Kane and with musicians and bystanders who were at the shoot; alternate exposures (Kane took a hundred and twenty); various stills; an 8-mm. movie taken by Milt Hinton's wife, Mona; and sequences from the brilliant "Sound of Jazz" television special, which had aired just six months earlier and included many of the same musicians.—*Whitney Balliett* (Moving Image; Feb. 17.)

IN THE BEDROOM
In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei). Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an elliptical short story by Andre Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings and moods, and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence actually means something.—*D.D.* (11/26/01)

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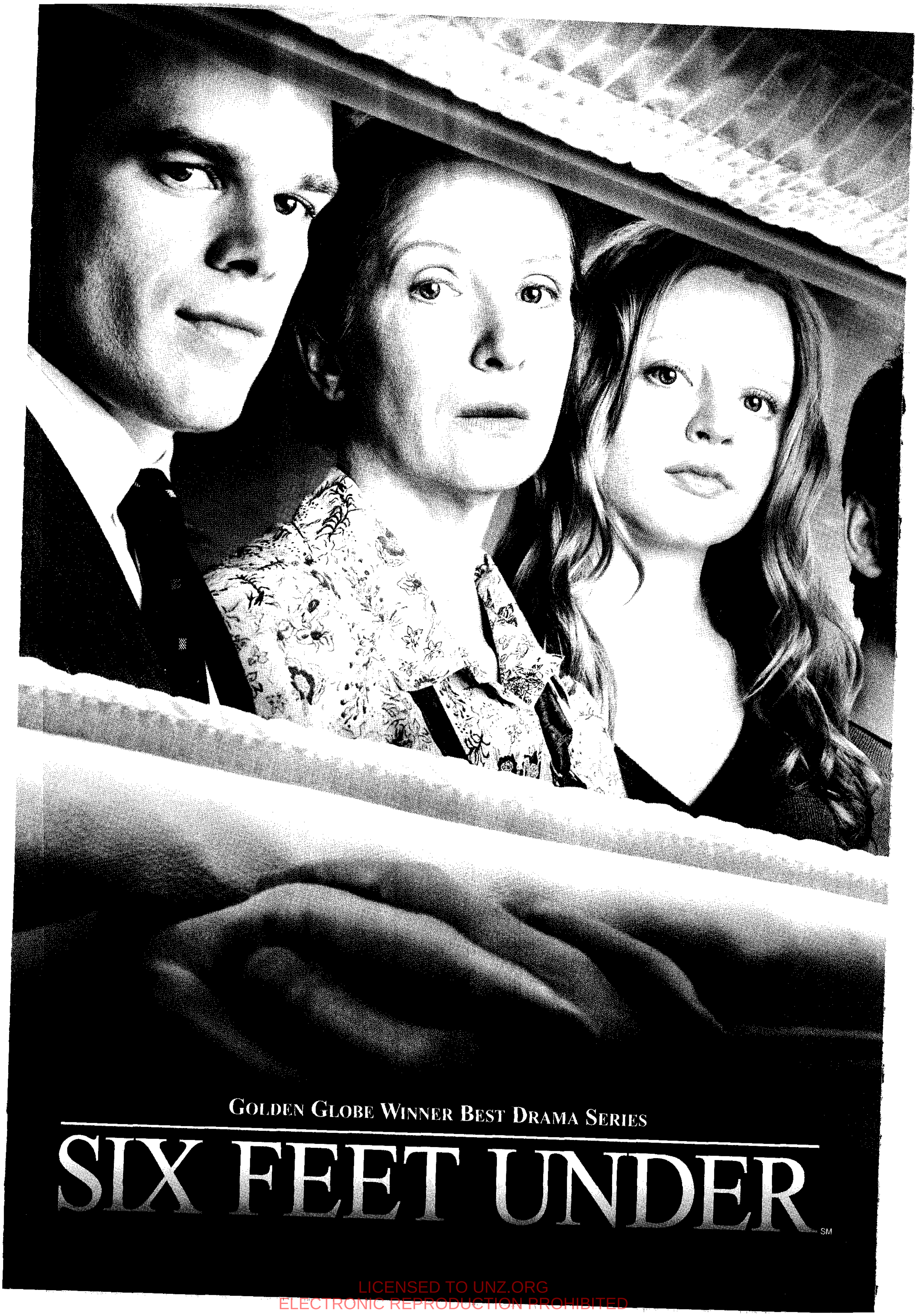
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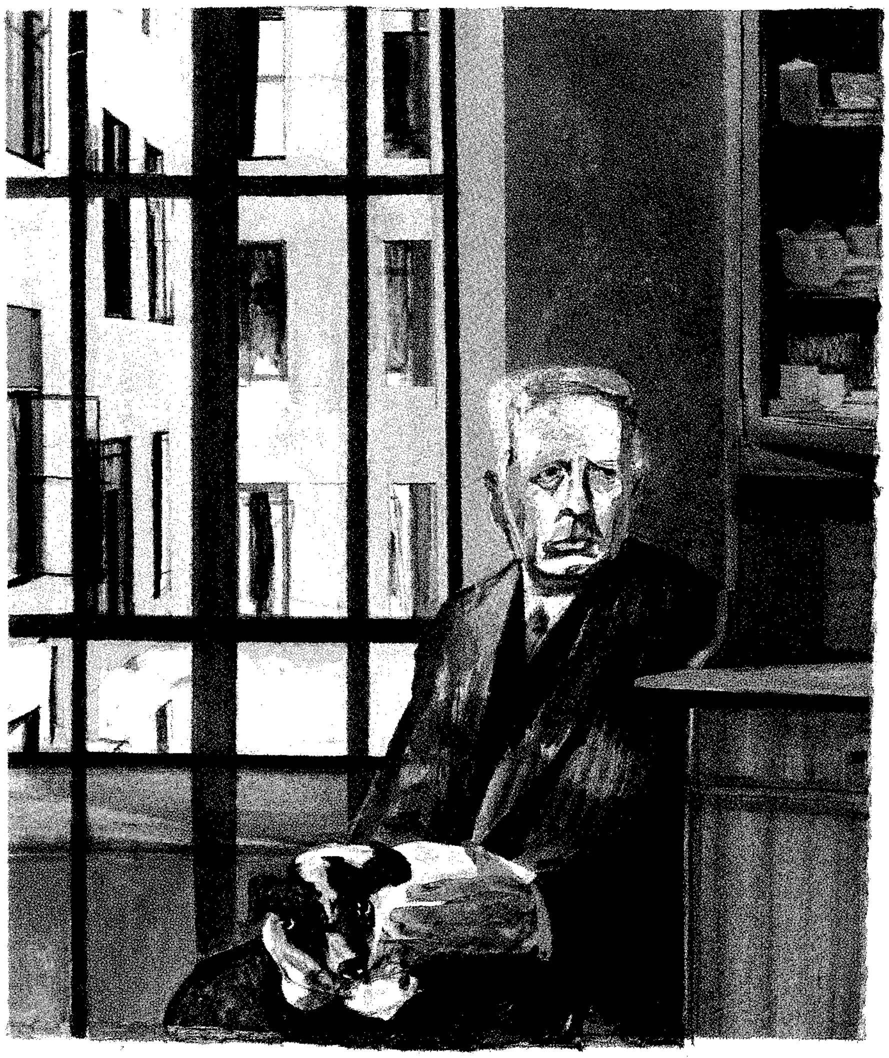
(Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 34th Street Theatre.)

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS
Another one of those Dogme '95 films that purport to give the viewer an authentic you-are-there-experience. Three couples travel together to Venice, a minimum of complications ensue, and, fortunately, the director Lone Scherfig doesn't have much to say. She gets credit, though, for making the least dogmatic of all the Dogme films. In Danish and Italian.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.)

LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN
Joan Fontaine suffers and suffers, but so *exquisitely* in this 1948 romantic evocation of late-nineteenth-century Vienna that one doesn't know whether to clobber the poor, wronged creature or to give in and weep. Max Ophüls made this film in Hollywood, but its Vienna is as romantically stylized and as beautifully textured as his European work. His theme (it was almost always his theme) is the difference in approaches to love. A pianist, Louis Jourdan, seduces the impressionable adolescent Joan and promptly forgets her; years later he meets her again, and, thinking her a fresh conquest, seduces her again. But in the intervening years she has borne him a child and remained hopelessly in love with him. This ironic love story, which is probably the toniest "woman's picture" ever made, is based on Stefan Zweig's "Brief Einer Unbekannten" and was written for the screen by Howard Koch.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Feb. 22.)

LOVING
A beautifully sustained piece of moviemaking by Irvin Kershner. This 1970 film looks at the failures of middle-class life without despising the people; it understands that they already despise themselves. George Segal is a freelance illustrator who makes good money but never makes enough money. He's trying to do right by his wife (Eva Marie Saint) and his children, and still keep the possibility open that he could yet be a dashing, gifted artist. The new girl he longs to run away with is not very different from his wife—only younger, and not bound down by his children. Eva Marie Saint gives a stunning performance as a tough, gallant woman who doesn't have many illusions about her husband or herself, and Segal has a loose, informal sense of irony—he radiates likable human weakness. There are some wonderful scenes: the couple going to see a house that has come on the market because of a divorce, Segal just standing and looking at his two daughters through the window of a suburban dress shop—children who are simultaneously alien to their father's life and at the center of it.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Feb. 25.)



BEST IN SHOW *In 1952, the directing-writing team of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini fulfilled their dream of creating a movie that would seem like "ninety minutes in the daily life of mankind." "Umberto D." follows a retired civil servant (Carlo Battisti) and his dog through the streets of Rome in a futile search for money and fellowship, and it's consistently heart-piercing up through its famous, final game of fetch. A restored print screens at Film Forum starting February 15.—Michael Sragow*

MONSTER'S BALL
Marc Forster's movie delivers an unworkable paradox: the characters are inarticulate, damaged people who have led heedless and tragic lives—portrayed with bitter realism—and yet the plotting is sheer Hollywood in its schemes and coincidences. Billy Bob Thornton is the Georgia corrections officer who conducts the execution of the husband (Sean "P. Diddy" Combs) of a local waitress (Halle Berry) and then falls in love with the widow. The slow, reticent dramaturgy has its moments of authenticity, especially in the balanced interracial romance: Thornton is quiet and affecting and Berry acts up a storm.—*D.D.* (Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Sunshine Cinema.)

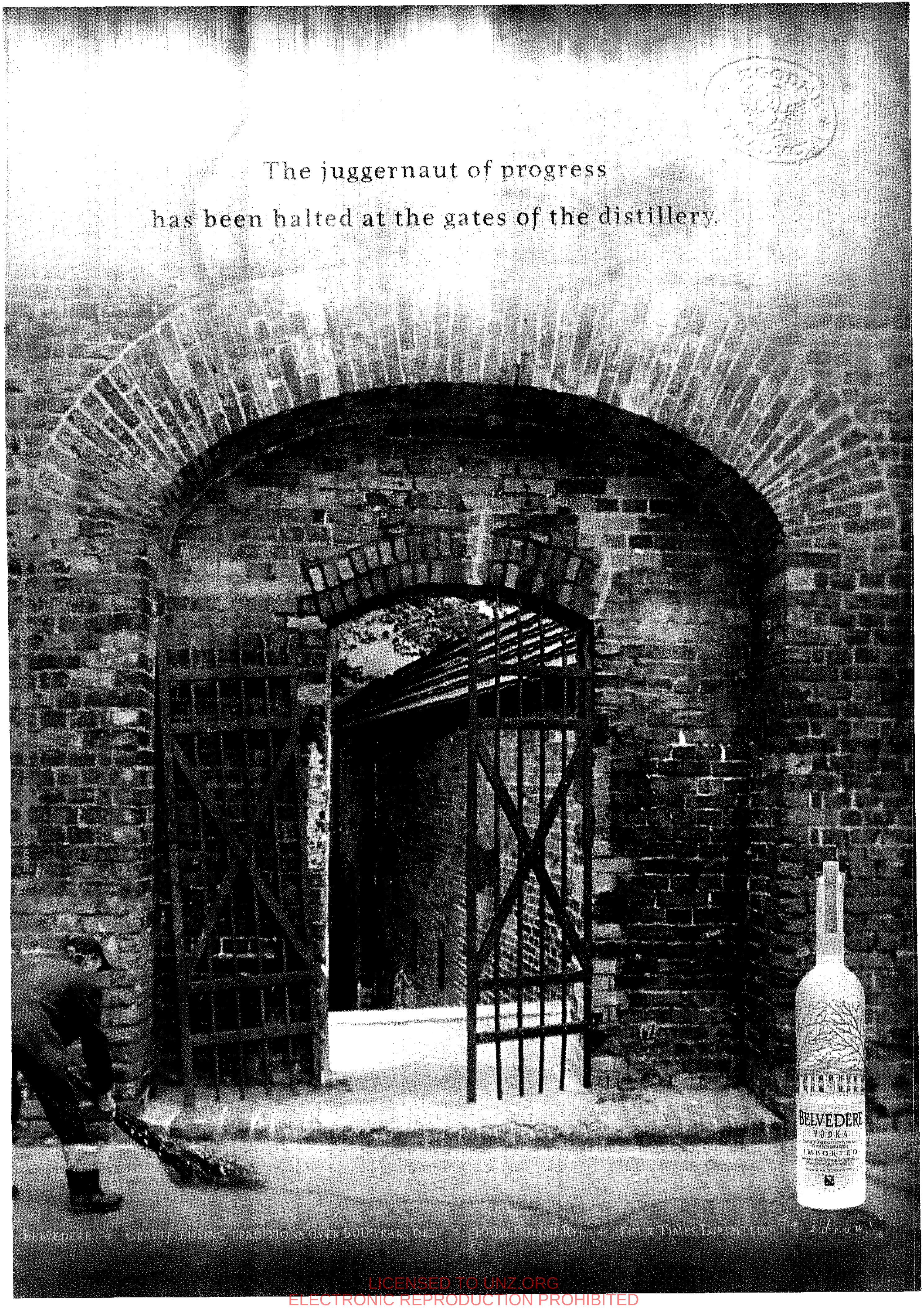
THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES
Richard Gere vainly attempts the quiet gravity of a spooky Bruce Willis performance in this overcooked atmospheric thriller about a widower whose life turns into an "X-Files" nightmare. The director, Mark Pellington, and the screenwriter, Richard Hatem, trot out the standard psychic visions and paranoia clichés in the well-crafted manner of people just doing their jobs, and nothing more.—*B.D.* (East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

ORANGE COUNTY
Mike White and Jake Kasdan, two of the talents who gave us the achingly nerdy television series "Freaks & Geeks," churn out a power-pop teen comedy for MTV Productions. The movie is loaded with cameos, the best of which is Lily Tomlin as a memory-impaired guidance counselor. When one of her lapses prevents the affable senior-class president (Colin Hanks) from gaining acceptance to Stanford, he decides to argue his case in person, enlisting the help of his crunchy girlfriend (Schuyler Fisk) and his sweaty armpit of a brother (Jack Black). Black, a volcanic pudgeball, spends most of his screen time snapping wisecracks in his tighty whities; needless to say, he's the funniest thing on display.—*Michael Agger* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS
After the brilliance of "Rushmore," his level-headed look at the gifts of a misfit, where could Wes Anderson go next? In the event, he has broadened his scope to take in an entire family of misfits: the Tenenbaums, residing in their colorful town house like kooky modern leftovers from the age of Edith Wharton—an age of innocence indeed, despite the ill will that gusts around. The parents (Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston) raised three overachieving children (Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and then separated. We are here for the aftermath: the daughter's fading marriage to a bearded melancholic (Bill Murray), and other sunderings and patchings-up. The movie is packed tight with strong, if baffled, feelings, and yet we could be watching it through glass; Anderson specializes in the cool, astringent gaze, and for anyone sick of Hollywood heart-melters this could be the antidote.—*A.L.* (12/17/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SECOND SKIN
A married man is torn between his wife-and-child homelife and his passion for his homosexual lover. This melodrama—a tasty twist on the sort of fifties "woman's picture" that Lana Turner excelled in—is directed with a lascivious eye by Gerardo Vera. He allows the actors (Jordi Mollà and Ariadna Gil as the married couple, Javier Bardem as the lover) ample time to get romantically lost and frustrated with each other. And though it follows an old blueprint the movie is juiced by Bardem's fresh performance—his puppy-dog eyes and animal physicality. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (Quad Cinema.)

THE SON'S ROOM
The Italian director Nanni Moretti has delved into his darkest material to date and come up with his best film; even here, amazing to report, his customary lightness of touch has not deserted him. Moretti himself stars as a psychiatrist, Giovanni, who is mar-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ried to the calm and adoring Paola (Laura Morante). They have two children (Jasmine Trinca and Giuseppe Sanfelice), one of whom dies, taking with him the dream of a happy family. Moretti's pacing is hard to fault, as he follows the hairline cracks that widen into gulfs and leave the household looking isolated and loveless. As a case study, the movie adds little to the archives of grief, and rightly so; Moretti is simply drawing up his own distinctively colored map of familiar terrain. In its sharp-etched way, this is no less comic than Moretti's other work, and, for all its sophistication, the comedy is of the primitive kind—that of continuing to live (to jog, to cook, to go to school) when the reason to live has fallen from your hands. In Italian.—*A.L.* (2/4/02) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

STORYTELLING
Another disturbance of the peace from the writer-director Todd Solondz, who made "Welcome to the Dollhouse" and "Happiness." This time, we get a movie split in half, the first part of which concerns a creative-writing student (Selma Blair), thin and white, who dumps her disabled boyfriend and, for good measure, sleeps with her black professor. In the second half, we trace the exploits of a documentary filmmaker (Paul Giamatti) who wants to unearth what the youth of today are doing with themselves in high school. The answer is, more or less, nothing, although we do come across one slacker who would like to be on TV. In short, Solondz presents two tales meant to winkle out the cultural encounters that embarrass us the most, and then twists the knife and leaves us squirming harder than before. It's clever enough, and you could gash yourself on some of the lines, but, when a director is as resolutely ungenerous as Solondz, the end can only come as a relief.—*A.L.* (2/4/02) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.)

ALSO PLAYING

AMÉLIE (11/5/01)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Paris, and 34th Street Theatre.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE
Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

I AM SAM (1/28/02)
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.

LANTANA
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Quad Cinema, and Union Square.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (12/24 & 31/01)
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

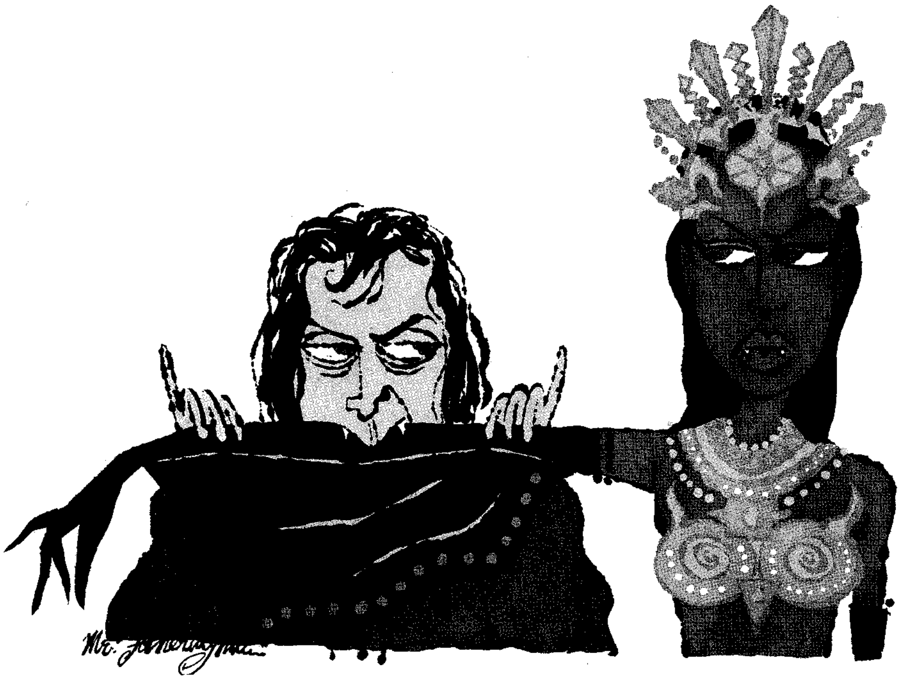
MULHOLLAND DRIVE (10/15/01)
Cinema Village, Empire 25, and 59th Street East Cinema.

SHIRI
Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



Opening February 22, "The Queen of the Damned."

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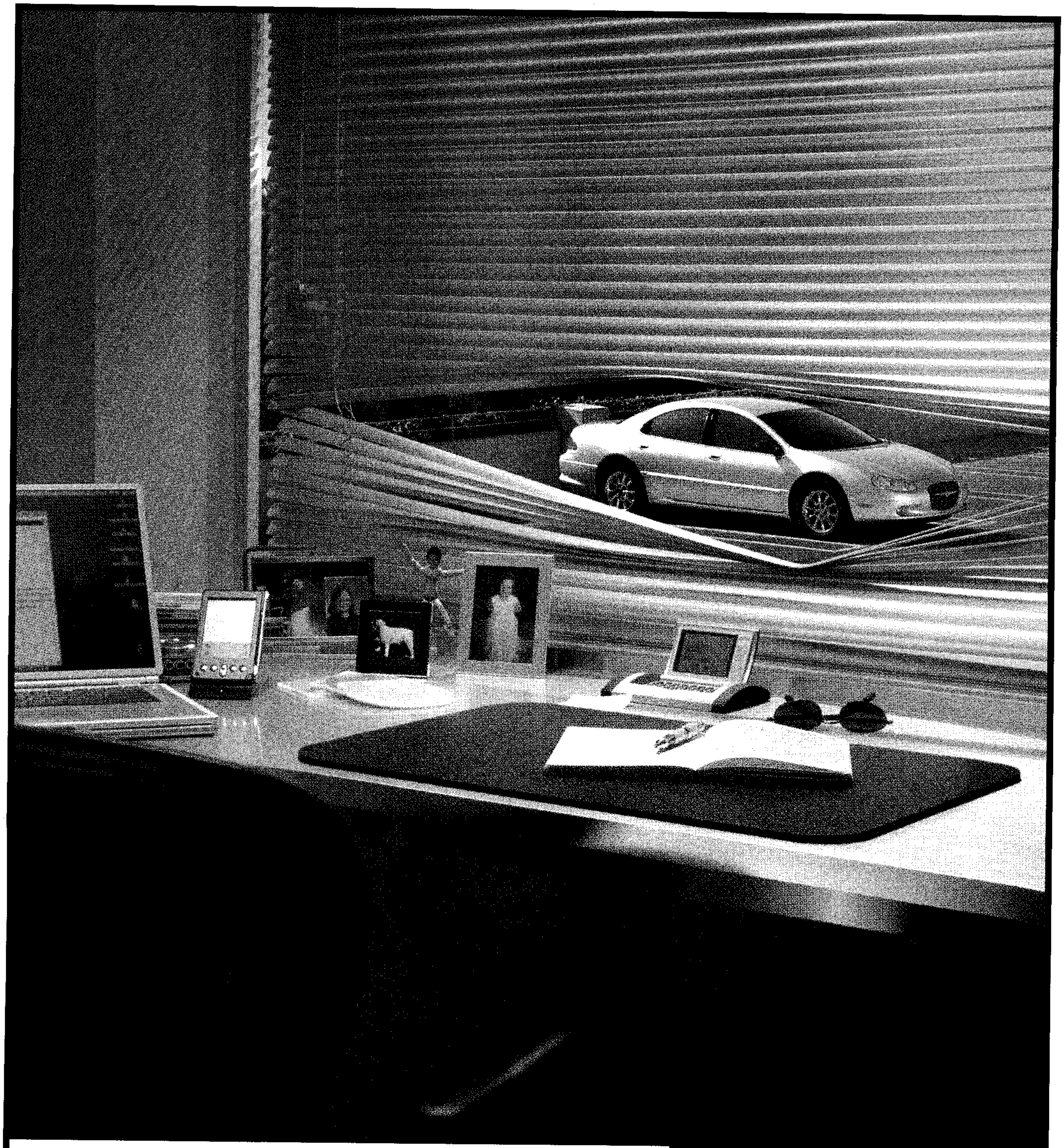
Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Feb. 17: "Across 110th Street: Images of Harlem on Film." Feb. 16 at 2: "Souls of Sin" (1949, Powell Lindsay). ♦ Feb. 16 at 4: "From These Roots" (1974, William Greaves) and "Renaissance Reunion" (1973/2002, Greaves). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2: "Black Roots" (1970, Lionel Rogosin) and "Looking for Langston" (1988, Isaac Julien). ♦ Feb. 17 at 4:30: "A Great Day in Harlem" (†). ♦ Starting Feb. 23: "New York, New York," films selected by the New York Film Critics Circle. Feb. 23 at 1: "Empire" (1964, Andy Warhol). ♦ Feb. 23 at 2: "Manhattan" (1979, Woody Allen). ♦ Feb. 23 at 4: "All About Eve" (1950, Joseph L. Mankiewicz). ♦ Feb. 24 at 4:15: "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Repertory night. Feb. 16-17 at 6:30: "Stray Dog" (1949, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 23-24 at 6:30: "Pickpocket" (1959, Robert Bresson; in French).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Starting Feb. 14: "The Wide World of Werner." Unless otherwise noted, all films are in German and directed by Werner Herzog. Feb. 14 at 7:30, Feb. 15 at 9:15, Feb. 16 at 5, and Feb. 17 at 6:15: "The Dark Glow of the Mountains" (1984) and "The Great Ecstasy of the Sculptor Steiner" (1973). ♦ Feb. 14 at 9:30, Feb. 16 at 7, and Feb. 17 at 8:30: "God's Angry Man" (1980; in English) and "Huie's Sermon" (1980; in English). ♦ Feb. 15 at 7, Feb. 16 at 9, and Feb. 17 at 4: "Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe" (1980, Les Blank; in English) and "Fata Morgana" (1970). ♦ Feb. 21 at 7, Feb. 22 at 9:30, Feb. 23 at 7:30, and Feb. 24 at 8:30: "Ballad of the Little Soldier" (1984) and "La Soufrière" (1977). ♦ Feb. 21 at 9, Feb. 23 at 5, and Feb. 24 at 6: "Burden of Dreams" (†). ♦ Feb. 22 at 7, Feb. 23 at 9:15, and Feb. 24 at 3:30: "My Best Fiend" (1999).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Feb. 14 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Holiday" (1938, George Cukor). ♦ Feb. 15 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Bad and the Beautiful" (1952, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ Feb. 16 at 2, 4:30, and 7: "The Paper Chase" (1973, James Bridges). ♦ Feb. 17 at 6:50 and 9:10: "All Fall Down" (1962, John Frankenheimer). ♦ Feb. 20 at 6:30 and 9:10: "Himatsuri" (1985, Mitsuo Yanagimachi; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 22 at 7: "Letter from an Unknown Woman" (†). ♦ Feb. 23 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Blue Dahlia" (1946, George Marshall). ♦ A tribute to Pauline Kael. Feb. 18 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Melvin & Howard" (1980, Jonathan Demme). The director will introduce the 6:50 screening. ♦ Feb. 19 at 5 and 8:30: "Nashville" (1975, Robert Altman). ♦ Feb. 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Loving" (†). The critic Armond White



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will introduce the 6:50 screening. ♦ Feb. 26 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). The writer Craig Seligman will introduce the 6:50 screening.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Feb. 13-14 at 1:20, 3:30, 5:40, 7:50, and 10: A new print of Mira Nair's "Salaam Bombay!" (1988; in English and Hindi). ♦ Starting Feb. 15 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, 6:15, 8, and 9:45: A restored print of Vittorio De Sica's "Umberto D." (1952; in Italian).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Films that portray *la vie d'artiste*. Feb. 19 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Montparnasse 19" (1958, Jacques Becker; in French). ♦ Feb. 26 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Van Gogh" (1991, Maurice Pialat; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Feb. 21: "Alexander Sokurov: A Retrospective." All films are in Russian. Feb. 14 and Feb. 17 at 2:30: "Sonata for Hitler" (1979) and "Moloch" (1999). ♦ Feb. 14 at 6: "Save and Protect" (1989). ♦ Feb. 15 at 2:30: "Stone" (1992). ♦ Feb. 15 at 6:30 and Feb. 17 at 5: "Taurus" (2001). ♦ Feb. 16 and Feb. 19 at 2:30: "Whispering Pages" (1993). ♦ Feb. 16 at 5: "A Soldier's Dream" (1995) and "Maria" (1978-1988). ♦ Feb. 18 at 2 and Feb. 21 at 6: "And Nothing More" (1982-87) and "Evening Sacrifice" (1987). ♦ Feb. 18 at 5 and Feb. 21 at 2:30: "Soviet Elegy" (1989) and "An Example of Intonation" (1991). ♦ Feb. 19 at 6: "Elegy" (1985-86) and "Dmitri Shostakovich: Sonata for Viola" (1981-86). ♦ Films from Africa. Feb. 15 at 8: "Lumumba" (2000, Raoul Peck; in French and Lingala). ♦ Feb. 22 at 8: "Camp de Thiaroye" (1987, Ousmane Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow; in Wolof and French). ♦ Critic's choice: J. Hoberman's favorite unreleased film from the Toronto film festival. Feb. 22 at 1 and Feb. 23 at 1:30: "La Commune (Paris, 1871)" (2000, Peter Watkins; in French). ♦ Feb. 24 at 1:30: Academy-nominated live-action and animated shorts. ♦ Feb. 24 at 4:30 and Feb. 25 at 12:30: Academy-nominated documentary shorts.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Feb. 13: "Afghanistan Then and Now." Feb. 13 at 2: "Massoud l'Afghan" (1998, Christophe de Ponfilly) and "Kabul at the End of the World" (1993, de Ponfilly). ♦ Feb. 13 at 5: "Dust of War" (1990, de Ponfilly). ♦ Special presentation. Feb. 13 at 8: "The Reckless Moment" (1949, Max Ophüls). ♦ Starting Feb. 15: "*Film Comment* Selects: The Best Unseen Films of 2001." Feb. 15 at 2, Feb. 16 at 6, and Feb. 17 at 4: "Martha . . . Martha" (2001, Sandrine Veysset; in French). ♦ Feb. 15 at 4:15, Feb. 17 at 6:15, Feb. 20 at 6:15, and Feb. 21 at 3:30: "The Mission" (1999, Johnnie To; in Cantonese). ♦ Feb. 15 at 6:15, Feb. 16 at 1:30, and Feb. 20 at 4: "Investigating Sex" (2001, Alan Rudolph). ♦ Feb. 15 at 8:30: "Trouble Every Day" (2001, Claire Denis; in French). ♦ Feb. 16 at 3:45, Feb. 17 at 2, Feb. 18 at 6:15: "Sleepy Time Gal" (2001, Christopher Münch). ♦ Feb. 16 at 8:15: "The Piano Teacher" (2001, Michael Haneke; in French). ♦ Feb. 17 at 8: "The Entity" (1982, Sidney J. Furie), shown with two experimental works by Peter Tscherkassky. ♦ Feb. 18 at 4 and 8:15 and Feb. 20 at 8:15: "Forever Mine" (2000, Paul Schrader). ♦ Feb. 21 at 5:15, Feb. 22 at 4, Feb. 24 at 8, and Feb. 26 at 1:30 and 6: "Barren Illusion" (1999, Kiyoshi Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 22 at 6:15 and Feb. 23 at 1: "Not Forgotten" (2000, Makoto Shinozaki; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 22 at 8:45, Feb. 24 at 4, and Feb. 25 at 2 and 6:15: "Ring" (1998, Hideo Nakata; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 23 at 3:30 and Feb. 26 at 8: "Ichi the Killer" (2001, Takeshi Miike; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 23 at 6:10, Feb. 24 at 1:45, and Feb. 25 at 4 and 8:15: "H-Story" (2001, Nobuhiro Suwa; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 23 at 8:30 and Feb. 26 at 3:30: "Pulse" (2001, Kiyoshi Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 24 at 6: "Harmful Insect" (2001, Akihiko Shiota; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 18-22: A midwinter-school-break presentation of Richard Lester's "A Hard Day's Night" (1964).

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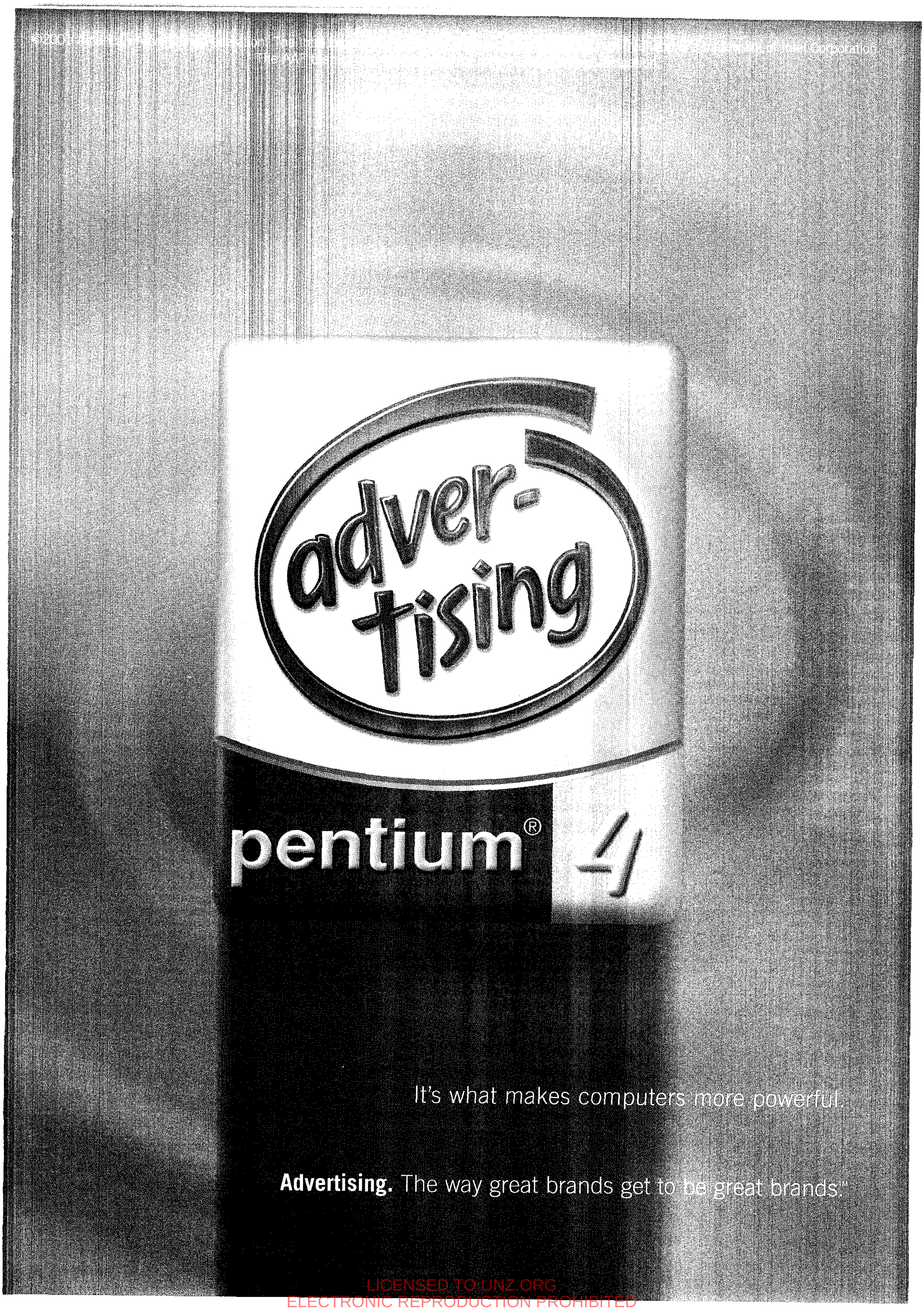
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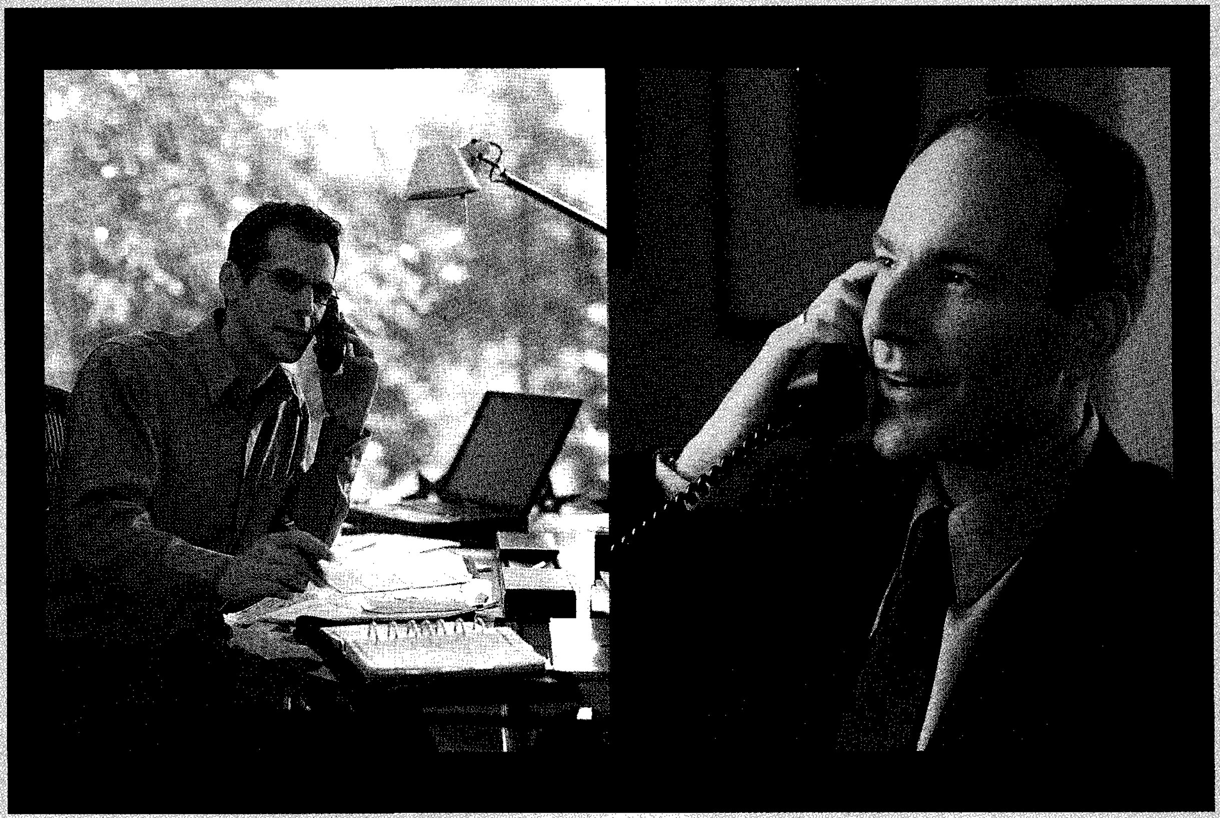

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
KIDNAPPED

So much anguish and sadness and fear have been visited upon so many people since September 11th—the thousands murdered that morning and killed or maimed since, the hundreds of thousands grieved or uprooted, the millions upon millions filled with a new kind of dread—that the case of Daniel Pearl adds but little to the dismal accounting. Yet it chills all the same. Pearl is—or was (at this writing, we do not know if he is alive or dead)—the South Asia bureau chief of the *Wall Street Journal*. On January 23rd, in Karachi, he was abducted in front of a restaurant where he had gone to meet someone who had promised to arrange an interview with the leader of a terrorist splinter group. After three days of silence, American and Pakistani journalists began to receive e-mails of a grotesque character. Their author or authors used a sickeningly "clever," hard-to-trace return address (kidnapperguy@hotmail.com); purported to represent an unknown but grandiosely titled organization (the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty); made demands, of a kind that no news organization could fulfill and no government should or would; threatened to kill Pearl within twenty-four hours, or within forty-eight hours; and enclosed a series of photographs, showing Pearl with his wrists chained, with a pistol pointed at his head, with a copy of a newspaper published after he was seized. A few days of this; then more e-mails, believed to be hoaxes, including one saying that Pearl had been killed; then silence, again. Toward the end of last week, the police in Pakistan identified, as the chief fugitive, a British-born son of Pakistani immigrants named Omar Saeed, who is prominent in Jaish-e-Mohammed, one of the terrorist groups banned last month by General Pervez Musharraf. If, as the police say, Saeed wrote the e-mails, then he did so in semiliterate disguise ("we give all amreekan journlists 3 days to get out of pakstan," etc.), for he was educated at private schools in England and at the London School of Economics.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

Amid the suffering of the many it is often the one who captures the imagination. The details of Daniel Pearl's life strike the same chord as those lives memorialized by the *Times* in its "Portraits of Grief" pages: he spent many evenings playing bluegrass on the electric fiddle in small saloons when he was stationed in Washington; his friends describe him as endearingly absent-minded; he is witty and, at thirty-eight, boyish and scholarly-looking, like a grownup Harry Potter. His wife, Mariane, who was in Karachi with him, is six months pregnant with their first child. He has written sympathetically about the Islamic world. Perhaps these things were unknown to his kidnappers. Perhaps they only made him a more inviting target.

The pleas to his kidnappers to release him—from colleagues, from fellow-journalists of many nationalities, from first-world Muslim celebrities like Muhammad Ali, Louis Farrakhan, and Yusuf Islam, the former pop star once known as Cat Stevens—have been fervent, and they have mostly made the same essential argument: you are hurting your cause. "The world is getting a

mixed message, and perhaps a negative impression of the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty" was how Paul E. Steiger, the *Journal's* managing editor, put it in an open letter. Louis Farrakhan wrote, "To execute or murder this man will increase hatred for Islam and damage the reputation of Muslims throughout the world." "If justice is your goal," Yusuf Islam wrote, "then the cause of justice will not be served by killing an innocent man who has nothing but a pen in his hand." If the kidnappers' goal were actually "justice," or winning good will for Muslims, then Farrakhan and Yusuf Islam would be right. If, for that matter, their goal is the fulfillment of their stated demands, then they will fail. But if what they want is simply publicity—for themselves, for their demands (which, having been published in nearly every newspaper in the world, will not be repeated here), for the "cause" of spreading a miasma of fear—then the ugly truth is that they have already succeeded. Were they to carry out their threat to murder Daniel Pearl, their success would be diminished—but not, alas, fully. Paul Steiger pleaded with the criminals for "a dialogue that will address your concerns." But, as his open letter implicitly recognized, they know that they can get more with a dialogue and a kidnapping than with a dialogue alone.

During the Gulf War, correspondents mostly sat in a briefing room in Saudi Arabia and listened to General Schwarzkopf. Terrorism and the war against it have made their trade dangerous again, in new and unnerving ways. In Afghanistan, more journalists than American soldiers were killed by weapons fired in anger. But this war is everywhere, and, unlike the Gulf War, which was over in six weeks, it has no end. Traditionally, the danger to reporters has come from strong, tyrannical governments, and for homegrown journalists in countries like Zimbabwe, or Iraq—where speaking or writing against Saddam Hussein is punishable by amputation of the tongue—this is still the case. But, for Western correspondents in this war, weak or compromised governments are the greater threat, as in Afghanistan, Somalia, and now, it appears, Pakistan. The rest of us rely on the courage of men and women like Daniel Pearl. At bottom, they are armed with nothing else.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

FREE MONEY

TRUMPERY BELOW CANAL

In Tribeca, apparently, there are people who still go home for lunch. The other day, a man returned to his building, on Hudson Street, near Jay Street, to discover half a dozen strangers occupying his lobby. They had set up card tables, where many of the man's neighbors sat, intently filling out forms. When the man asked one of the strangers what they were doing, the stranger said, "Sir, the American people are here to help you."

The man said, "Excuse me?"

"We are here to help you, in your time of need."

The strangers, it emerged, were representatives not of the American people, exactly, but of the American Red Cross, and they had come to this building, which, it must be said, is a very nice building, full of very expensive duplexes and lofts, to offer relief. Volunteers from the Red Cross, which raised eight hundred and fifty million dollars after September 11th, were visiting other buildings, too, as part of a campaign to give money to the residents of Manhattan below Canal Street who might have been displaced, traumatized, or merely inconvenienced by the collapse of the World Trade Center.

The stranger explained the deal. The Red Cross was offering Tribeca residents the equivalent of three months' mortgage and maintenance payments (or rent), along with money for utilities, groceries, transportation, and medical expenses, if applicable. In a building like the one on Hudson Street, some victims could expect more than fifteen thousand dollars.

The man was stunned. He said, "That's obscene." He said that he didn't begrudge anyone's collecting the money, but that he didn't want any of it himself, and he headed for the elevator.

As the elevator doors closed, the building's superintendent slipped in behind him. "You're being a fool," the superintendent said. "They're giving it away."

In the lobby, meanwhile, the building's residents were getting punchy. They just looked at one another and laughed. One man smirked and said, "Sub-Zero." A woman thought that she might donate twenty, maybe twenty-five, per cent of the proceeds to an organization that supports rescue dogs. A week later, a first installment had arrived, by Federal Express, but she was expecting more. "I want that money," she said. "I don't feel bad. If I felt I was taking it from someone else who deserved . . . When you think of the misdirection of funds . . . I love the idea that I can redirect the funds."

She did not love the idea enough, however, to redirect all the funds. "I'm trying to get extra therapy sessions out of it," she said. The Red Cross had told her that if she'd been traumatized in some way by the events of September 11th it would reimburse her for psychiatric treatment. "I gave a form to my analyst, for her to sign. She was very clear: she'd fill out a form, but she wouldn't lie." Her particular September 11th experience had been hard, in its way. "I had to walk home from Seventy-second and Madison in brand-new Manolo Blahniks," she explained.

By the beginning of February, word was getting around the neighborhood. Red Cross volunteers, as cheerful as Mormon missionaries, had been making house calls. On Franklin Street, neighbors asked one another, "Did you get your money yet?" Those who hadn't began to worry that the windfall might pass them by, so they sought out the Red Cross instead. They went to a makeshift service center on Canal Street, and said—maybe truthfully, maybe not—that they had been displaced by the World Trade Center's collapse, for a day, for a week, for a month. Within days, they, too, had checks. ("If people take our money and they don't need it, well, shame on them," Frank Donaghue, a Red Cross spokesman, said.) One recipient reported that a Red Cross volunteer had recommended that he deposit his share in increments of less than seven thousand dollars, so as not to alert the Internal Revenue Service. The money was tax-free, but who needs the hassle?

"Dude," a lawyer who lives in Tribeca said last week, "I hope this story doesn't break before I get paid." He had his money the next day.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

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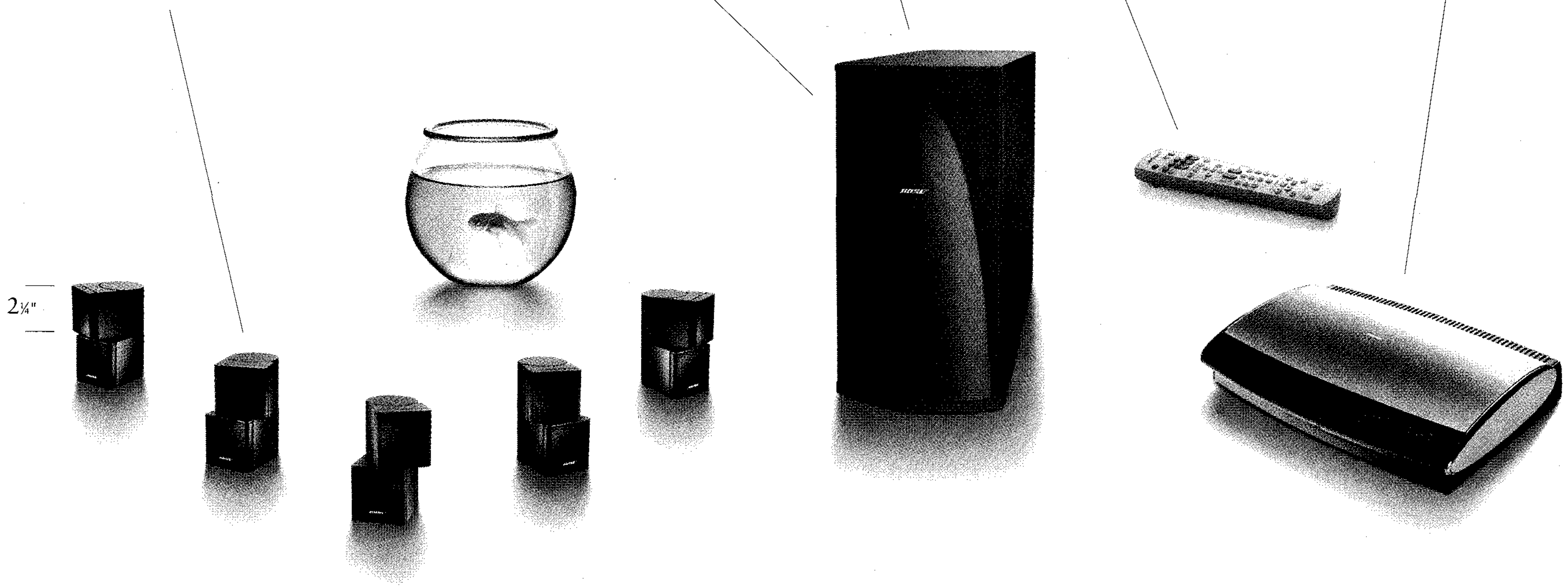

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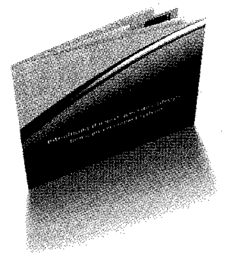

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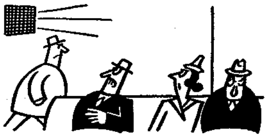


Norman Pattiz, the man in charge of delivering the American message over the radio waves to the Middle East, is not a policy wonk. To begin with, he lives in Beverly Hills, not Washington, and he likes to spend his time going to Laker games with Sylvester Stallone and Heather Locklear, and driving his 1984 Aston Martin. Until recently, he may not have known Dubai from the Doobie Brothers, but Pattiz has other qualifications. He is the founder and chairman of Westwood One, the $3.5-billion company that is the country's largest distributor of commercial radio programming. Starting next month, he will oversee an innovative radio network aimed at bringing American values and pop culture to Arabs in the Middle East. The project, which has a budget of thirty million dollars, is being launched by the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees international government-sponsored broadcasting.

Pattiz, who was appointed to the board by President Clinton, started planning the venture well before September 11th. But since the terrorist attacks, the project has taken on new urgency and has won overwhelming support from Congress. "There's no question that there's a media war going on," Pattiz said last week. "The enemy's weapons are hate radio, incitement to violence, disinformation, and censorship." He went on, "Why do they hate us? Because they don't know us. Will they like us when they *do* know us in an accurate fashion? Put it this way: We stand a better chance." He was speaking by telephone from his office in Los Angeles. He lives in a house that he bought from his friend David Geffen. A miniature cable car carries guests from the upper grounds to the lower.

"I've got a lot of toys," said Pattiz, who, at fifty-nine, wears a gray buzz cut, calculated stubble, and a huge N.B.A. championship ring that was a gift from Shaquille O'Neal. "But I am so much more excited about *this*."

Pattiz calls his Middle East project "The New Station for the New Generation." It will broadcast twenty-four hours a day and will devote most of that time to playing a blend of Western and Arab pop music, a decision that has some critics worried. But Pattiz views the music as "just a tool to deliver the audience." Twice an hour, the music will be interrupted by five-minute news segments in Arabic, reported by American-sponsored journalists. There will also be life-style segments, on issues such as dating and personal finance, and listener call-in programs. On a demo tape for the station a listener named "Mohammad" calls in to ask, "Why is the U.S. at war with Islam?" (Answer: "It isn't.")

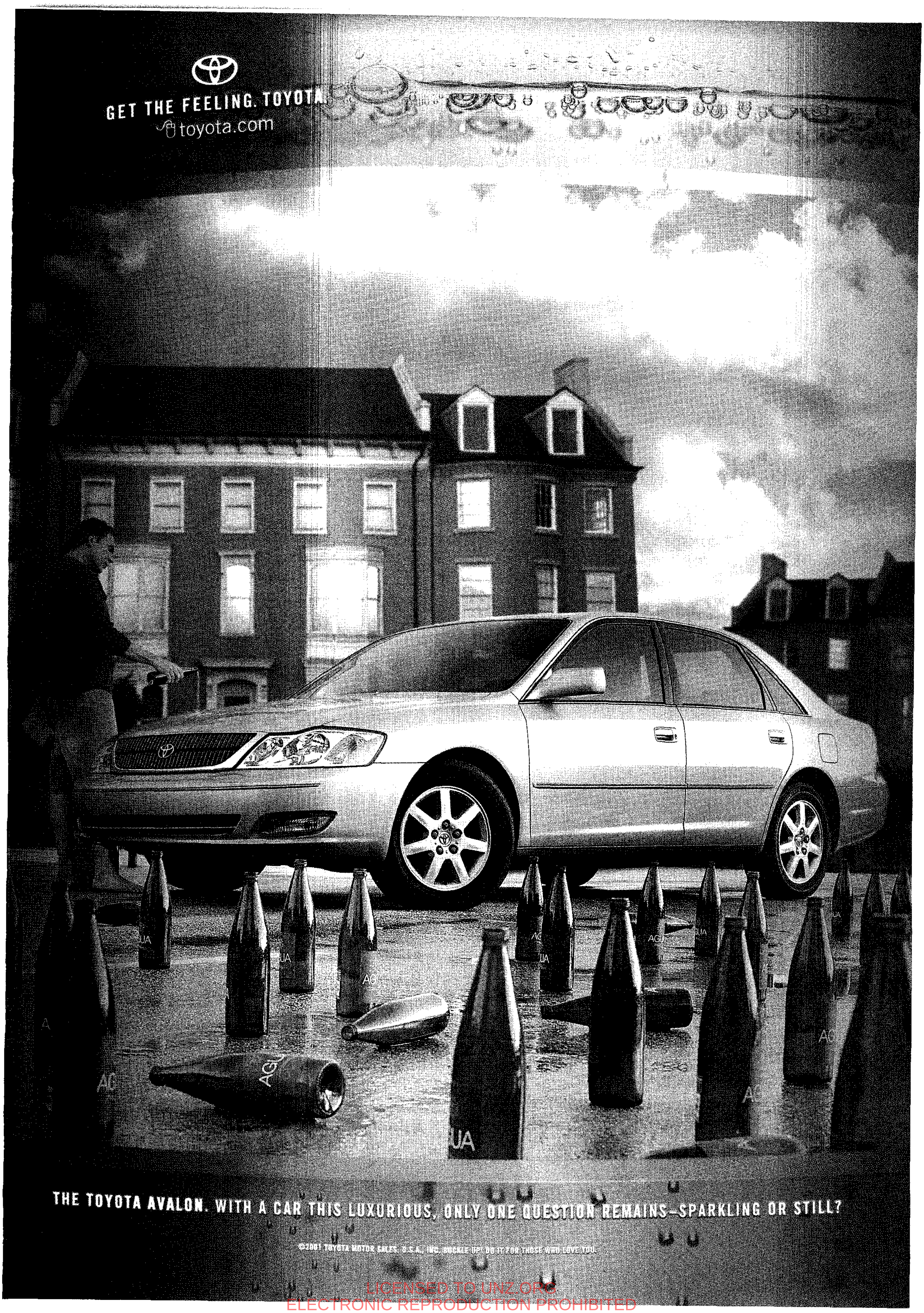
Pattiz considers himself well qualified to sell American values. "I am absolutely a good cover boy for the American Dream," he said. He grew up in a middle-class family in West L.A., and started in ad sales. One day in 1975, when he was out of work, he happened to hear a Motown special on a local radio station, and it gave him an idea: he would produce and package similar features for national syndication, saving stations the production costs and reaching a larger advertising audience.

In 1994, after the Democrats lost control of Congress, Pattiz told David Geffen, a friend of Bill Clinton's, that the President wasn't handling Rush Limbaugh effectively. The next day, he says, the White House called, saying Clinton wanted his advice. "It was the beginning of a friendship," Pattiz says, and he promptly became a significant political donor. By the end of the 2000 election cycle, he had contributed close to four hundred thousand dollars to the Democratic Party and was invited to spend a night in the Lincoln bedroom.

Last year, Pattiz visited the Middle East and came away with a vision of how to get the American message across to the Arab world. It's not enough, he says, "to put the Secretary of State on an Arab program for four minutes and then have him trashed as soon as he's off." In planning his new station, he has been using the same market-research techniques that Westwood One uses. He convened focus groups in Cairo to compile lists of favorite recording artists, subjects that would appeal to listeners, and topics or artists that should be avoided. (Eminem and Puff Daddy are out, Britney and Cher are in.) Pattiz also hired Casey Kasem's producer, Bert Kleinman, to give the station more of a Top Forty style.

"Will the religious extremists like it?" Pattiz asked himself the other day. "Probably not. But you've got to go after the hearts and minds you can get." He has a lot of faith in the power of American pop culture. "After all," he said, "it was MTV that brought down the Berlin Wall."

—*Jane Mayer*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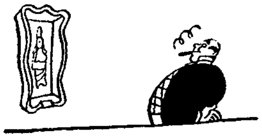
AT THE GALLERIES
OLD MASTER, NEW HANDS



The most expensive Old Master painting currently known to be for sale anywhere in the world is a Rembrandt, painted in 1635, that has just been brought to the market by a gallery on the Upper East Side. It costs forty million dollars. The gallery is Otto Naumann, at 22 East Eightieth Street, a town house, and as you walk in the door you see the painting ahead of you and slightly to the left. It is called "Minerva in Her Study," after the goddess of wisdom and war.

Otto Naumann has an oval face, brown eyes, and a blond beard that has gone gray. He has an identical twin, Francis, who has a gallery upstairs. He likes to collect portraits in pairs—mainly husbands and wives. Of the more than five hundred paintings attributed to Rembrandt forty years ago, he says, fewer than three hundred are now accepted as authentic. About half of these are portraits. In addition, Rembrandt made perhaps a hundred history paintings. "Minerva" is probably the last that will ever freely change hands. All but two of the others are in museums. Those two are in England and are unlikely to receive licenses to leave.

The first person known to have owned "Minerva" was James, Lord Somerville, who bought the painting around 1720. For some two hundred years, the painting hung in his house in Scotland. In 1924, the picture was bought at auction by Lord Duveen, the world's most famous art dealer. Another owner was Axel Wenner-Gren, who also owned the company that made the Electrolux vacuum cleaner. The last time "Minerva" was offered to the public, at auction in 1975, it was bought by Baron Marcel Bich, who invented the Bic pen. About fifteen years ago, he went partners with a Japanese company in the building of a golf course near Paris, and in 1988 he sold the company "Minerva."

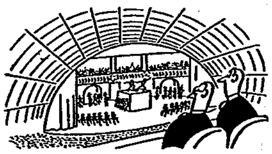
Last spring, the painting was sent to Holland for a show. The morning after the show ended, Otto Naumann left New York, flew to Amsterdam, took a taxi to a warehouse next to the airport, and bought the painting. He saw it put into a crate, and he signed his name on the seals at each corner. Then he drove to a beach with the people he had bought the painting from. They opened some champagne, and when they finished he went back to the airport and was home in New York for dinner. Over the summer, a restorer removed a yellow varnish that had collected dirt. "The varnish would have been laid on almost surely by Duveen," Naumann says. "He was famous for hocus-pocus art dealing."

The figure of Minerva is illuminated by a pattern of light in the shape of a diamond that encloses the center of the painting. She is sitting at a table, with a book open, and she appears to have been interrupted. One hand marks the passage she was reading; the other rests on the arm of the chair. "She looks like she's maybe about to say something," Naumann says. "Rembrandt is famous for people about to speak." She has long, wavy blond hair and is wearing a blue-gray dress and a heavy gold cloak. Behind her is a globe, a gold helmet, a spear, and a shield with the head of Medusa—her armaments. Along the margin of one page are two small depressions, like holes, in the paint. Naumann thinks that, sometime before the paint dried, another painting in the studio fell on "Minerva" and dented it. Which leaves one to conjure up the figure of a disconsolate young man walking along a street in Amsterdam, kicking a stone and wondering what he will do now.

Naumann has no idea how long he will have "Minerva." He could sell it at auction, but he likes having it around. The last time he had a Rembrandt, a few years ago, Steve Wynn, the former casino owner, walked into the gallery and bought it and a Rubens hanging next to it and said, "Get them out to the airport. I'm leaving for Las Vegas in a few hours, and I want them on my jet." When Wynn sold his company to MGM Grand, the paintings went with it.

—*Alec Wilkinson*

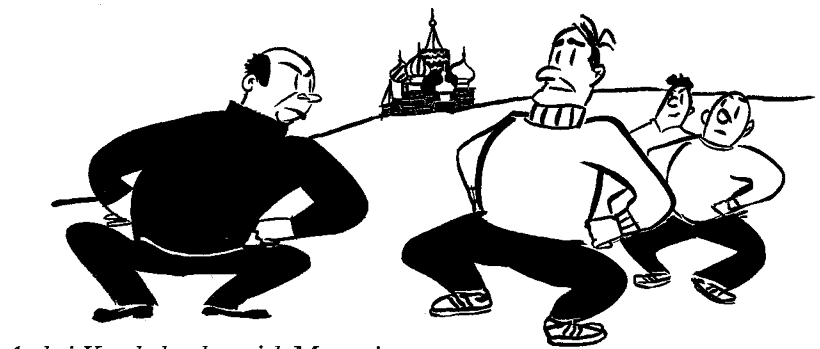
DRY RUN DEPT.
IS MOSCOW BURNING?



In Tolstoy's "War and Peace," the burning of Moscow after Napoleon's forces invaded it, in 1812, is attributed to a panicky exodus of Muscovites. In Prokofiev's opera "War and Peace," which was composed after Germany invaded Russia, in 1941, the event becomes an act of heroic self-sacrifice: the citizens torch the city while singing "Moscow will not bow before the enemy!" The other morning at the Metropolitan Opera House, where the opera is having its Met première, on February 14th, a hundred and twenty members of the company's chorus arrived to receive their torching orders.

Dressed in sweatshirts, jeans, and sneakers, the Met's Muscovites milled around a steeply raked mound of mud, on which a nineteenth-century-style street lamp perched crookedly. Behind the set loomed a white backdrop that flickered with images of Moscow's onion-domed skyline.

A scholarly-looking man in black observed the preparations with a thoughtful expression. This was the Russian film and theatre director Andrei Konchalovsky, who is making his Met début, after staging the gargantuan opera to great acclaim in St. Petersburg. (Perhaps the most populous production in the Met's history, the staging employs, in addition to the chorus, two hundred and twenty-seven supernumeraries, sixty-



Andrei Konchalovsky, with Muscovites

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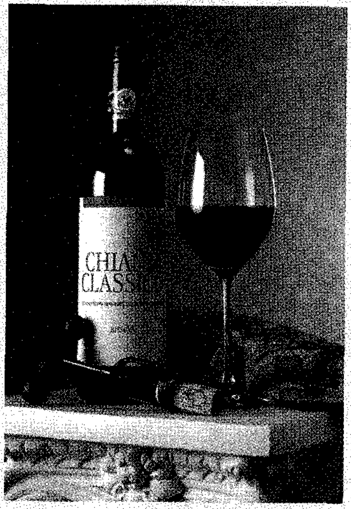
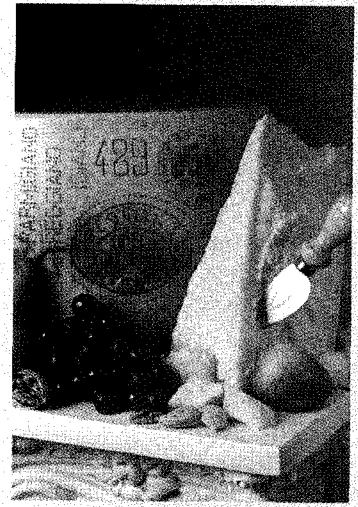


For many Italians, uncorking a bottle of Chianti Classico Black Rooster wine is like inviting a close friend with a great personality to share a meal, a celebration or an intimate moment in their lives. Chianti Classico Black Rooster wines are as much a part of Italian culture as Giotto's paintings, Dante Alighieri's poetry, Michelangelo's statues, Leonardo da Vinci's inventions or Galileo's scientific discoveries. The Chianti zone, between Florence and Siena, in the heart of Tuscany, has been producing wine since the times of the Etruscans.

The regular Chianti Classico Black Rooster wine is a relatively young wine that is richly fruity, while the Riserva is a prestigious wine made with the best grapes and more full-bodied with a complex bouquet. Both wines have a ruby-red color turning to garnet with aging. Chianti Classico Black Rooster wines have a spicy aroma with a scent of wild berries, while the flavor is elegant, full-bodied, harmonious and velvety.

There's no better way to drink a glass of Chianti Classico Black Rooster wine than with a piece of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Each bottle marked with a Black Rooster seal ensures the highest standards of production.



Whatever the profession, Italians love food. While they consider Parmigiano-Reggiano an essential ingredient in any recipe, they know that as a table cheese it is second to none. When Parmigiano-Reggiano is savored with a glass of Chianti Classico Black Rooster wine, in the classic Italian style, its texture, aroma, and flavor can best be appreciated.

Parmigiano-Reggiano, the world's unique parmesan cheese, is produced exclusively in the provinces of Parma, Reggio *Emilia* and Modena in their entirety as well as portions of Mantua and Bologna. A hard granular cheese, Parmigiano-Reggiano is cooked but not pressed, and is made from partially skimmed unpasteurized cow's milk, collected immediately after milking. Most cheeses are aged for an average of 24 months before being released to the market for sale.

Parmigiano-Reggiano, known as the great cheese of eight centuries, has remained unchanged since its creation 800 years ago. Each wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano is a signed, limited edition and carries proof of its authencity - the Parmigiano-Reggiano pin-dots pressed into the rind. Additionally, the cheese is permanently marked with the Consorzio's oval certification mark as well as the production date and the registration number that identifies the manufacturing dairy. Like any artist, we sign all our masterpieces.

Chianti Classico
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Consorzio Del Formaggio
Parmigiano-Reggiano

eight named characters, four chickens, a horse, a goat, and a Maltese lapdog.)

At a signal from Konchalovsky, Joel Revzen, an assistant conductor, raised his arms, and the Muscovites began rushing around the mound, shaking their fists and singing—in Russian—"Burn! Burn!" An assistant stage director named Irkin Gabitov called out something in Russian. Next to him, an assistant stage director named Peter McClintock translated: "Ladies and gentlemen, don't run!" The Muscovites stopped, then started again, more slowly. Some of them put on expressions of desperation. Others looked staunchly defiant. As they moved, the lighting changed to crimson, and smoky clouds raced across the backdrop. Gabitov shouted something. McClintock translated: "Ladies and gentlemen, we want to see you constantly looking up there." The Muscovites raised their eyes and shook their fists at the Family Circle.

A few minutes later, they were joined by the production's Napoleon Bonaparte, a Russian baritone in a red pullover named Vassily Gerello. He sang, in a dark voice, "What barbarians!" The Muscovites replied, "O brothers . . . we shall swear a solemn oath in blood!" A bearded, hawk-nosed man in a suit—the Met's Napoleonic general manager, Joseph Volpe—entered the auditorium, positioned himself in front of the stage, and gazed fiercely at the proceedings. After the singers took a break, he shook Napoleon's hand, and nodded approvingly before exiting through a side door.

For the Muscovites, the morning's final piece of stage business was the most complicated. As they sang another round of "O brothers . . .," they were told to break into a peasantlike four-beat dance, stomping one foot, then the other, then the first foot again, and then, the last time, lowering themselves into a squatting position. Valiantly, they stomped and squatted on the muddy terrain. Konchalovsky left his seat and conferred with his assistant director. Gabitov shouted something. McClintock translated: "Ladies and gentlemen, you're starting on the wrong foot." The Muscovites did the sequence again. "No, no, no," Konchalovsky said, breaking into English. He climbed onstage and demonstrated the Russian way of stomping and squatting. "Remember to hold your position on the fourth beat," he said, bending his knees. The conductor gave the downbeat again, and this time the Muscovites executed three stomps and one squat, gingerly but correctly. "Better!" Konchalovsky said. He headed into the wings and paused in front of a stagehand who was holding black batons with long wicks. "Are these the torches?" he asked.

"Yes," the stagehand replied. "We can cut the wicks to any length you want."

"Well," Konchalovsky said, "just make sure they give enough fire."

—*Charles Michener*

TOY DEPT.
MR. POTATO HEAD'S BIRTHDAY

On the eve of the Toy Fair last week, Hasbro gave a party at the company's Chelsea showroom to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of its first toy, Mr. Potato Head. Guests included a couple of dozen four-to-seven-year-olds from the nearby Educare Early Childhood Center. They were greeted by Hasbro's chairman and C.E.O., Alan G. Hassenfeld, and a battalion of his aides, who helped the kids with their name tags, Mr. Potato Head T-shirts, and cone-shaped party hats. The aides presented the little guests with "Collector's Edition" gift tins containing kits for "Face-changing Fun with 17 Interchangeable Parts!" The guests promptly and seriously, as one, sat down on the floor, opened the tins, and started decorating six-by-four-inch plastic potatoes. (The original Mr. P. H., in 1952, consisted of only a few parts, including a pipe, to stick on a real potato.) Mr. Hassenfeld, a relentlessly cheerful gentleman with a pudgy, jowelly face that bore a resemblance to Mr. P. H.'s, sat down on the floor with the kids and selected a nose or a hat from a tin and offered it here and there.

"I'm the third-generation Hassenfeld in the business," he said. "My dad introduced Mr. Potato Head to the world."

The kids nearest to him didn't seem to hear. Their name tags identified them as Mia Ramirez, Ahmad Ibrahim, and Justin Alexander.

"My dad loved him," the C.E.O. said.

"He got no neck, only feet," Mia Ramirez said.

"He was the first toy to be advertised on television," Mr. Hassenfeld said. "We've sold more than fifty million Mr. Potato Heads since 1952."

"Can I peel him?" Justin Alexander asked, holding up the plastic potato.

"No," the C.E.O. said amiably. He turned and said, "Oh, here's our star, Hallie Eisenberg, and her mother!" He got up from the floor to greet a nine-year-old girl with long, loose ringlets, squinty eyes, and impressive dimples. She was wearing a chic black pants suit with a sparkling belt buckle. Without a cue, she sank to the floor and grabbed some P.H. parts, flashing dimples at the younger guests. They gaped at her.

A couple of Hasbro aides moved in. "Hallie is in the new Pepsi Twist TV commercial," one said. "Hallie's face morphs into Halle Berry's."

"Hallie loves Mr. Potato Head," her mother said.

Hallie said that she was in fourth grade and that she did a lot of extracurricular activities. "I try to do things to raise awareness that kids can help out in their country," she said.

"Wait till you see Mr. Potato Head's hundred-and-fifty-pound birthday cake," a Hasbro aide said.

Mr. Hassenfeld, who had mounted a stage, spoke again. "I'd like to take you down memory lane," he said. "Truman! Eisenhower! Howdy Doody on television!" The schoolkids looked puzzled. "We changed the way the country viewed potatoes," Mr. Hassenfeld said. "We took away Mr. Potato Head's pipe. We discouraged smoking. Mr. Potato Head truly became an icon of American pop culture."

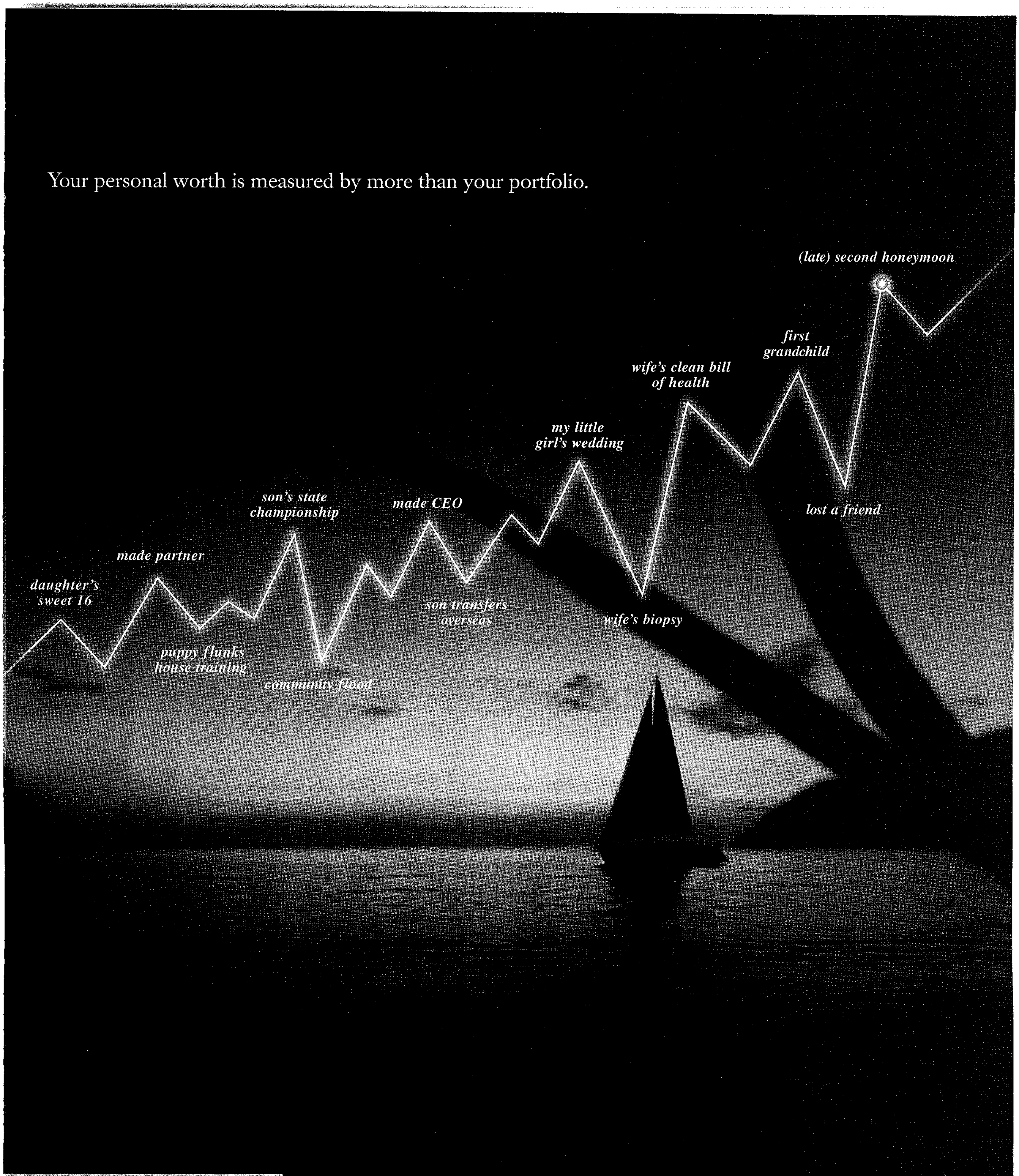
On the stage, an actor inside a large Mr. Potato Head costume waddled out wearing a green cap and giant blue shoes. He waved white-gloved mitts.

"Time to sing 'Happy Birthday'!" Mr. Hassenfeld said.

Everybody, more or less, sang. Hallie Eisenberg hugged the waving character. Photographers got to work.

"Give us your best Potato Head smile!" a Hasbro P.R. man called out to her. She gave it, with long-held dimples. Then Mia Ramirez, Ahmad Ibrahim, and Justin Alexander scrambled onstage, free at last, and pulled aggressively at the character's floppy foam arms and hands and poked their little fists inside his wide plastic mouth, which kept on smiling.

—*Lillian Ross*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LETTER FROM TEHRAN

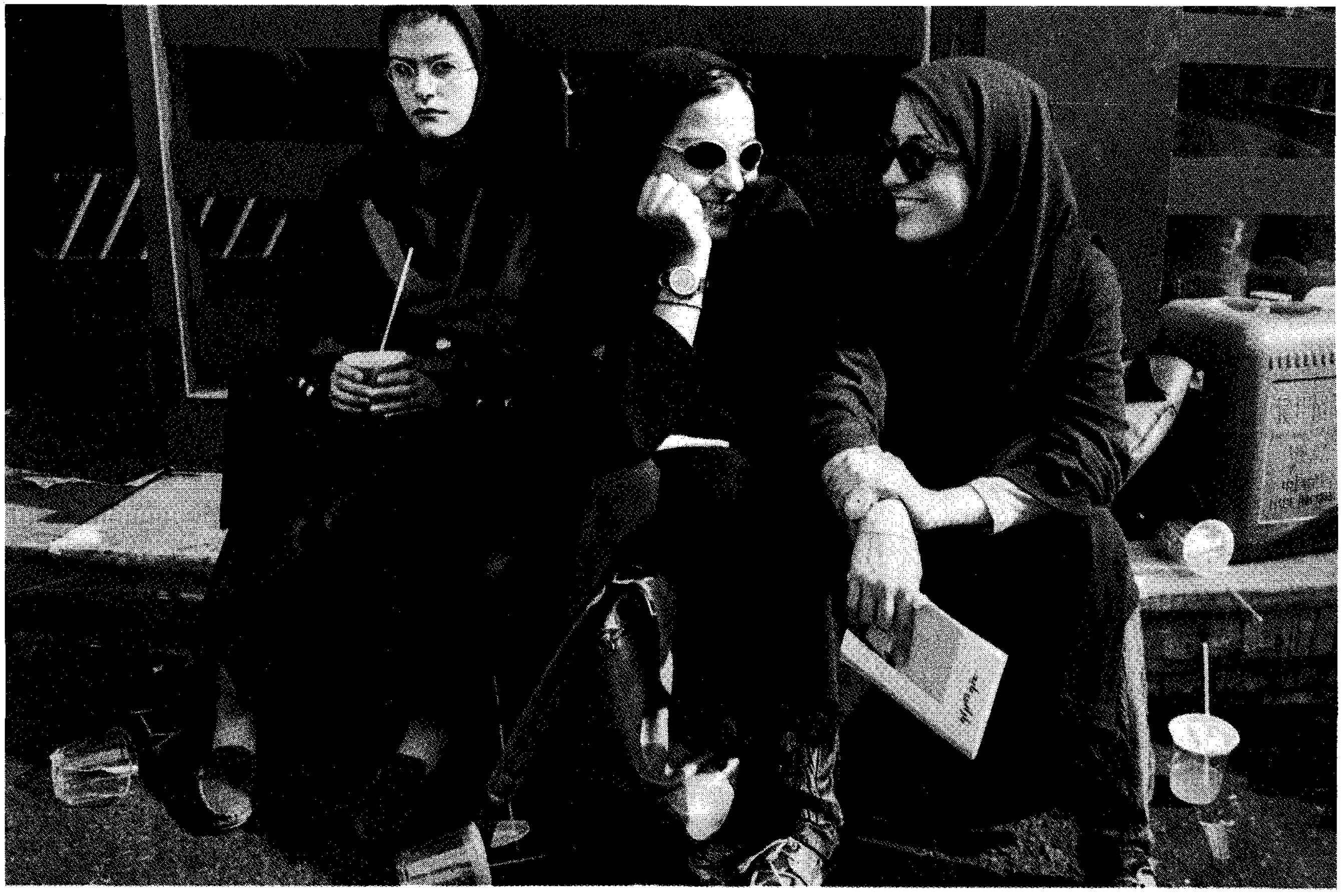
SHADOW LAND

Who's winning the fight for Iran's future?

BY JOE KLEIN

On the evening of September 11, 2001, about two hundred young people gathered in Madar Square, on the north side of Tehran, in a spontaneous candlelight vigil to express sympathy and support for the United States. A second vigil, the next night, was attacked by the *basij*, a volunteer force of religious vigilantes, and then dispersed by the police. The vigils may have been the only pro-American demonstrations in the Islamic world after the terrorist attacks on the United States. "It was what we all were feeling," said Arash, a young teacher I met; he had stayed home with his wife, Ava—these are not their real names—nervously watching the unimaginable television images from America. "But I was also worried: Would the Americans blame Iran for this? How would our government respond? Would we express sympathy and condemn the attacks, or would it be a *Marg bar Amrika*"—"Death to America"—"reaction? Finally, at ten o'clock, Khatami came on and expressed sympathy. What a relief!"

The statement that Mohammad Khatami, Iran's popularly elected President, made was extraordinary—extraordinary to American ears, at least. "My deep sympathy goes out to the American nation, particularly those who have suffered from the attacks and also the families of the victims," he said. "Terrorism is doomed, and the international community should stem it and take effective measures in a bid to eradicate it."



Every Iranian woman makes a political statement simply by where she places her scarf on her head and how long her cloak is.

ISABELLE ESHRAGHI/AGENCE VU

Three months later, Ava, who is also a teacher, sat in the comfortable, rose-colored living room of the couple's North Tehran flat, listening to her husband. She is a bright and fiery woman, and this was a rare moment of repose. "Do you want to know what I was really worried about?" she said, pausing for ironic effect. "Woody Allen. I didn't want him to die. I wanted to know that he was all right. I love his films."

But wasn't she pleased by President Khatami's statement? "Khatami! I don't believe in Khatami. I believe in Superman." She shrugged and raised her eyebrows. "At least in the world of Superman there is a certain logic. There are rules. There is no logic in the world of Khatami. He's just part of an irrational system. At the top of the system is the Supreme Leader." This is actually a constitutional office, occupied by the chief religious figure in the country. Its first, and most memorable, occupant was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini; since Khomeini's death, in 1989, the office has been held, less notably, by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "But nobody believes in the Supreme Leader," she went on. "Everybody believes in Khatami. Everybody votes for Khatami, who has none of the power. Nobody votes for the conservatives, but they have all of the power. So I like the fantasy of Superman better than the fantasy of Khatami."

Mohammad Khatami is, indeed, a curious public figure. He is fifty-eight years old, and even his opponents concede that he is a gentle, charming, and learned man. He is a popular, charismatic politician; women consider him sexy, clean-cut, an elegant dresser. ("When he was elected President, I pasted pictures of him all over my car," a young woman who was studying insurance finance at a local business school told me. "I don't know why I did that. I never do things like that.") He has been elected President twice, by large majorities; his first election, in 1997, came as a shock to Iran's clerical establishment and launched what seemed a significant political reform movement. But Khatami and his allies have no control over the military, the police, or the courts, and there is a growing sense now that he is only a mirage—a courtly shimmer of intellectuality and moderation masking a brutal, obstinate, and impenetrable system.

In fact, the *Marg bar Amrika* chants returned to Iranian public discourse two weeks after the World Trade Center attack, when the Supreme Leader spoke in Tehran. Ali Khamenei is, in his way, every bit as curious a figure as Khatami. Khamenei's position is impossible: his image is twinned everywhere with Ayatollah Khomeini's on giant wall murals and in public offices, and he suffers in comparison. Khamenei, who wears thick eyeglasses, seems bland and slightly befuddled next to Khomeini's eternal glower. Khamenei tries to emulate his predecessor's vehemence at times, but his public statements tend to be pedestrian and vituperative, if such a combination is possible, and his reaction to America's call for an anti-Taliban coalition in Afghanistan was typically obtuse. "You, who have always caused blows to Iran's interests," Khamenei said, referring to the "incompetent" American government and its "disgusting" campaign against terrorism. "How dare you request help [from us] in order to attack the innocent Muslim nation of Afghanistan, which has suffered and which is our neighbor? . . . The Islamic Republic of Iran will not participate in any move which is headed by the United States."

Khamenei's statement was not definitive, though. Two days later, at the Friday prayers at Tehran University, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—who had preceded Khatami as President and remains a prominent political force—announced yet another modification of Iran's position: "Despite all the differences we have . . . and if the United States does not want to impose its ideas, we can become a member of a U.N.-led antiterror coalition."

There were further shadings by other public officials over the next few weeks, none of which quite acknowledged the reality of the situation: Iran and the United States were momentary allies. The Iranians had always opposed the Taliban; they were longtime supporters of the Northern Alliance rebels, especially the warlord Ismail Khan, whose territory, around the city of Herat, is close to Iran's eastern border. When the war began in Afghanistan, Iran joined the so-called six-plus-two talks (the six neighboring countries to Afghanistan plus the United States and Russia) aimed at establishing a post-Taliban government; at one of the meetings at the U.N., Colin Powell shook hands with Kamal Kharrazi, the Iranian Foreign Minister—the first official contact between the two nations since 1979, when the Shah was overthrown. The Iranians quietly agreed to rescue American fliers downed in their territory, and allowed American food relief to be unloaded in a Persian Gulf port.

But the rapprochement was temporary; now Iran has been included, along with North Korea and Iraq, in President Bush's "axis of evil"—a designation that the Supreme Leader responded to by saying, "The Islamic Republic is proud to be the target of the rage and hatred of the world's greatest Satan." Iran seems to have increased its support of radical Islamic groups like Hezbollah and Hamas since September 11th; in early January, the Israelis intercepted a ship, the Karine A, carrying fifty tons of arms apparently donated by Iran's Revolutionary Guards—an élite militia controlled by the clerics—to the Pales-

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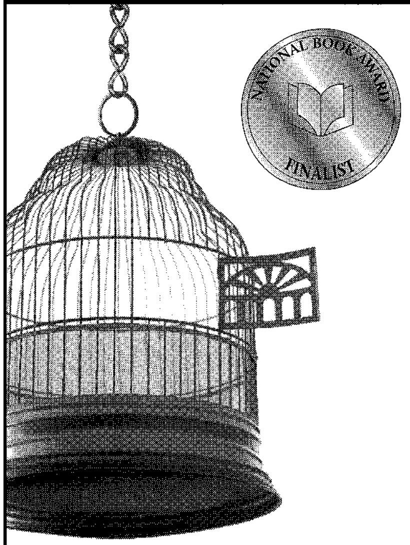

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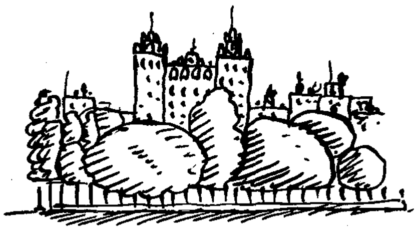
tinian Authority. (Iran has denied the connection.) This was a puzzling escalation, according to American security experts. Ship traffic in the Persian Gulf is closely monitored; the Iranians had to know that the scheme would be found out. Indeed, it almost seemed an intentional effort to infuriate the United States and burnish Iran's radical credentials in the Islamic world. But, just as the Iranian government had taken at least three different public positions on the September 11th attacks, so it stood on rapprochement with the United States, support for the Palestinian rejectionists, and almost every other public issue: there are shadings and subtleties, conflicting statements and occasional outrages. A purposeful opacity seems the only rule.

"Iran is a kaleidoscope," says Kenneth Pollack, who is the deputy director of national-security studies for the Council on Foreign Relations and who was a director for Persian Gulf affairs at the National Security Council during the Clinton Administration. "There are fourteen dozen different positions on each issue, and it is very difficult to say with any certainty which of the insiders support which position. Khatami indicated a willingness to accommodate the United States on the three basic areas important to America: weapons of mass destruction, the Palestinian question, and Iran's covert-intelligence activities. But he couldn't get anywhere with Khamenei and the hard-liners. It's not impossible that some of them were sending a message to Khatami as well as to us with the Karine A."

Khatami, Khamenei, Khomeini, Rafsanjani: the names are easily confused by inattentive Westerners, who tend to have only two indelible images of post-revolutionary Iran—the furious visage of Ayatollah Khomeini and, in 1979, the blindfolded, stumbling Americans held hostage in the Tehran Embassy compound by radical students. Iran's upheaval was the first successful religious revolution in the Islamic world, threatening not only to the West but also to the secular dictators and royal families who controlled every other nation in the region. The new Islamic Republic of Iran went through an early messianic phase, in which the country's Shiites attempted to export Islamic radicalism—a difficult sale in a world where eighty-five per cent of Muslims are Sunni. Iran was particularly active in Lebanon, where American hostages were seized in the nineteen-eighties, and the United States Embassy and Marine barracks were bombed in 1983. Two years of Jacobin terror within Iran ended only when Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded and an unspeakably brutal eight-year war ensued, in which at least three hundred thousand Iranians were killed. Khomeini died in 1989, just after a sullen truce took hold. The second decade of the Islamic Republic was a fretful attempt to recover from war and mayhem.

A glacial power struggle has followed. Indeed, in Iran it is practically impossible to get a clear answer to the simplest of questions: Who is running this country? Quite often, the response is nervous laughter. Academics, when asked, will draw inconclusive flow charts of the government's structure: there are shadow institutions everywhere—regular courts and clerical courts, a regular army and a revolutionary army, an elected parliament and a clerical Council of Guardians. At the top of these charts sits the Supreme Leader—but Ayatollah Khamenei is widely regarded as a mediocrity, and no one seems entirely convinced that he is actually in charge. The most vehement, and surprisingly frequent, answer to the question tends to be the most melodramatic. "There is a small group, a dark group, that really runs the country," a prominent Tehran businessman told me. "They decide who is assassinated and who is arrested, they threaten and blackmail the leaders. They never speak publicly."

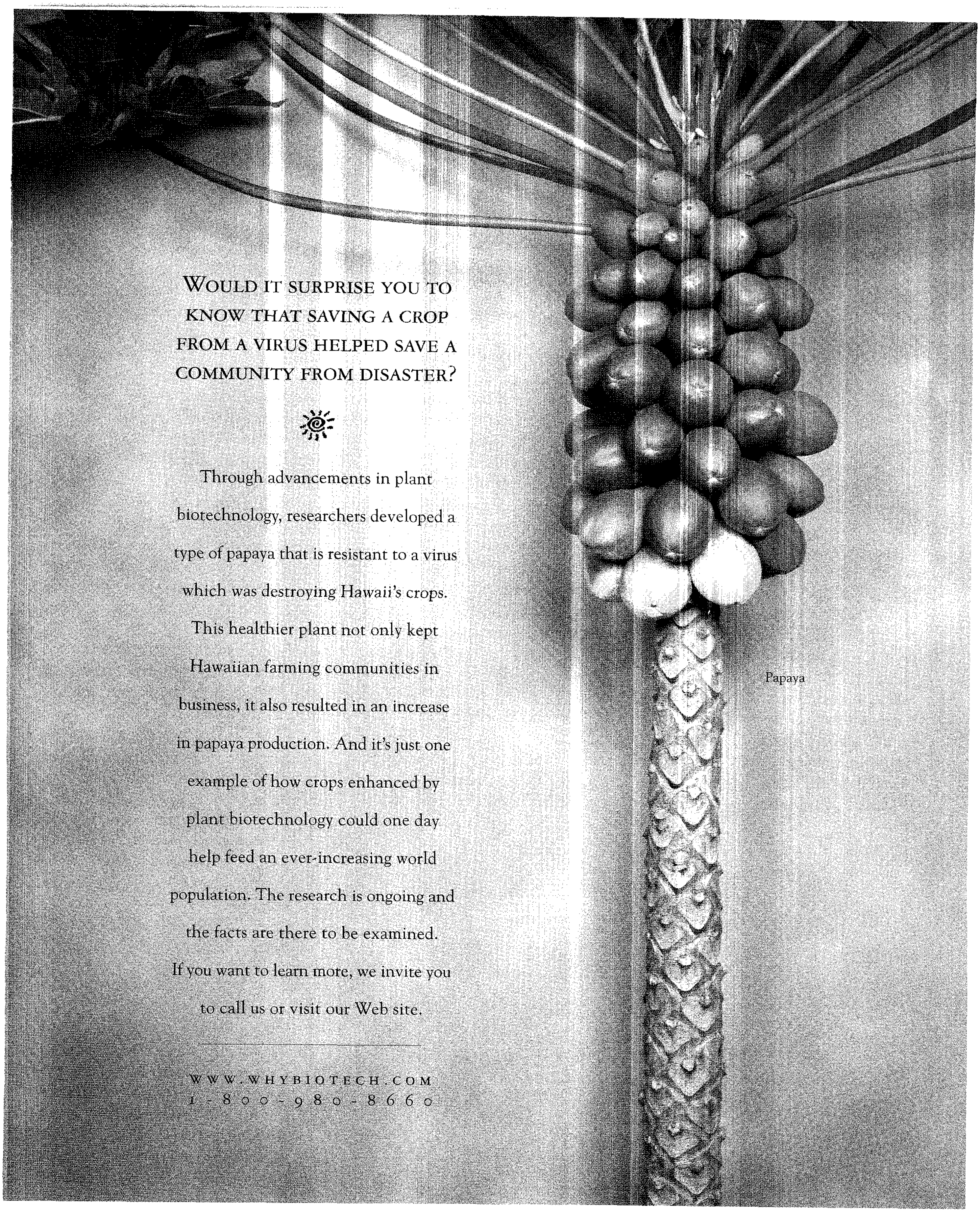
But, then, Iranians are inveterate conspiracy theorists; there are always international cabals directed against their nation, inevitably orchestrated by either the British, who held the country as a semi-colony after the discovery of oil, or the Americans. There is sufficient evidence of Anglo-American misbehavior to make this theory credible: there was the C.I.A.-sponsored coup that toppled the popular, nationalist Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and restored the Shah to power, in 1953; there was the continuing American support for the Shah's vicious secret service, the SAVAK; there was the covert but obvious support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War (including, the conspiracy theorists insist, the provision of chemical and biological weaponry); there was the accidental shooting down of an Iran Air jumbo jet over the Persian Gulf, in 1988, which nobody believes was an accident. "Is it not possible that Bush himself orchestrated the September 11th attacks?" a college professor in Isfahan asked me after an hour of careful, sophisticated political analysis. "He did not really win the election, and this was a way to unite the nation behind him."



And so Ava's comic-book metaphor carries with it a fundamental truth: Iran, at times, can seem like Bizarro World, the shattered, doppelgänger planet from the Superman comic books. Western visitors note the difference between the austerity of public life and the normality of private life: for years, the most popular journalistic image has been of Iranian women wearing designer dresses beneath their chadors. A pirated version of Victoria's Secret recently opened in Tehran—no lingerie is visible from the street, of course. Cosmetic surgery is all the rage. "We are the world capital of nose jobs," an Iranian woman writer told me. "Think about it—when the mullahs took away our bodies, all we had left were our faces. Look at the noses on the street. You'll see."

But the most striking thing about the street is how relaxed it is. There isn't an oppressive police or military presence, and not much of a religious presence, either: few mullahs wander about (except in Qom, the religious center, and a few other holy sites). Indeed, there is little sense of the political fervor common to "the street" in other Islamic countries. Iranians are still recuperating from their radical moment. "We want a *refo*lution, not a revolution," Hamid Reza Jalaipour, a newspaper publisher who was jailed briefly, said. He was referring to the radical reforms many Iranians are seeking. "We've had enough violence."

Most Westerners who visit Iran are surprised by how unexceptionally mod-



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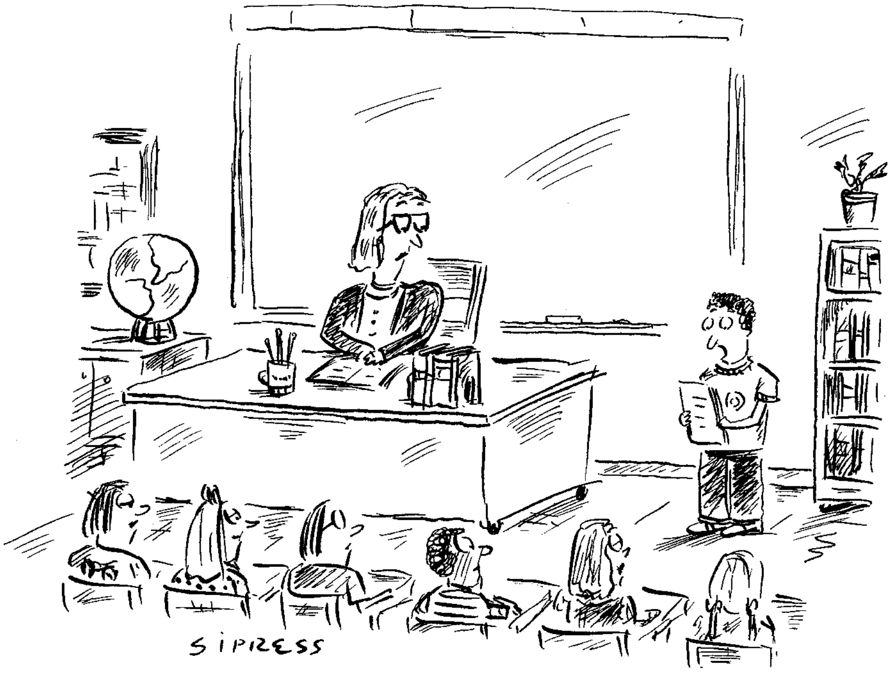
ern it is: it has little of the seething poverty or primitive clannishness common in neighboring Central and South Asian countries. The economy is said to be stagnant, and unemployment is relatively high, but oil revenues subsidize food and housing for the poor and gasoline for the middle class (which costs five cents per litre). Tehran, a city of putty-colored buildings tucked against the Alborz Mountains, wreathed in smog and overwhelmed by a perpetual traffic jam, resembles no place so much as it does Los Angeles. On the north side of town, creeping up between the knuckles of the Alborz foothills, there are affluent neighborhoods with high-rise apartment buildings and fancy shops. Satellite dishes, although illegal, are becoming popular anyway; and Internet use is apparently resistant to intermittent attempts by the government to regulate it. Near Tehran University, there is a row of bookstores (roughly eighty per cent of Iran's population is literate and seventy per cent is under the age of thirty) that sell practically everything—except, perhaps, the works of Salman Rushdie. Most of the anti-American murals around town have been removed, except on the walls surrounding the old United States Embassy compound, and those seem anachronistic and pitiful: "On the day the U.S. will praise us," one reads, "we will mourn."

For several years—especially after Khatami was first elected President—that day seemed imminent. But the public and private faces of Iran have reversed themselves in the Islamic revolution's second generation. Khatami provides a public image of moderation. Privately, however, the government is, in some ways, as intemperate as ever; it is certainly more desperate now, facing a public that, for the first time since the overthrow of the Shah, is obviously hostile. The conservative counterattack has largely succeeded in neutralizing the reform movement. Those close to Khatami—and, apparently, Khatami himself—fear that the moment for reform may have come and gone. "He did not want to be a candidate for reëlection in 2001," said Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a mullah who has been one of Khatami's closest associates for twenty years. "He thought that there was no way to make progress on reform. But his friends convinced him to run. We said even if there is slow movement toward reform it is better than nothing."



"'GameBoy: A Memoir of Addiction,' by Ronald Markowitz."

Khatami didn't particularly want to be a candidate for President in 1997, either. His political career, which had been a tasteful, aristocratic amble toward prominence, had taken a detour. He had been ousted as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1992, apparently for entertaining the possibility that Islamic guidance did not need to be dogmatic. He was shuffled off to become head of the National Library, a position that seems to have delighted him. He spent five years there, reading, communing with intellectuals, and waiting.

After the revolution, Presidential elections in Iran had been fairly inconsequential: the Presidential candidate, usually selected without much fuss by the Supreme Leader, was meant to be a managerial sort. He could serve for two consecutive terms and—since there wasn't much in the way of democracy on offer—he inevitably did. Rafsanjani, Iran's ultimate and seemingly eternal pragmatist, ended his second term as President in 1997. Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, the Speaker of the parliament, was expected to float into power simply because he had been designated. However, there was a small group of reformers who believed that it was time to test the democracy promised in the Islamic constitution. They wanted to propose their own candidate for President, a long shot—a thoughtful, unthreatening protest candidate, the Persian equivalent of Eugene McCarthy.

"Khatami was in Lebanon, visiting libraries or some such thing," Karim Arghandehpour, an editor at *Nowrooz*, the leading reform newspaper, recalls. "I was working at another paper, *Salam*, then"—*Salam* has since been closed by the mullahs—"and several of our editors and other reformists decided to propose Khatami for President. We printed a front-page color photo of him. He was very upset. 'I haven't been consulted about this,' he said."

Salam's initiative evoked a surprising response. Suddenly, all sorts of people were asking Khatami to run. "I was among those pushing for the idea of Khatami as President," Hadi Semati, a political-science professor at Tehran University, said. "He said, 'You haven't found anyone stupider than me to do this?' But he was perfect! He wasn't a typical politician. He wasn't a politician at all. He was a thinker. At the National Library, he had been exploring the most important question in Iranian politics: How do you reconcile freedom and religion?"

The campaign lasted two weeks.

"There had never been anything like this before," Semati said. "I had studied American politics, and had some insights. I proposed that Khatami take a bus tour through northern Iran. The crowds were enormous. Everyone was surprised. The conservatives were still expecting to win on Election Day."

Khatami got nearly seventy per cent of the vote. He won everywhere, in every demographic group; he even carried Qom, the religious citadel. The very size of the victory appeared to change Iran's political calculus, and the librarian began to act as if he had actually won a mandate to lead the nation. His demeanor itself was a political statement; his constant smile conveyed kindliness and confidence, and something else as well—the promise of freedom. He spoke of the rule of law. He said that he didn't want photographs of himself plastered about, lest there be a cult of personality. He said it was unseemly to chant things like "Death to America" at public rallies. He was interviewed by Christiane Amanpour for CNN, and the footage later became part of a documentary that seemed to presume Iran's imminent transformation into a moderate, democratic society. He addressed the United Nations, calling for a "dialogue among civilizations," and Secretary-General Kofi Annan was so impressed that he designated 2001 as the year when the dialogue would take place. Indeed, Khatami seemed embarked on a path that would put him in the same pantheon as Nelson Mandela and Václav Havel. His annual visits to the United Nations became significant events; in 2000, a handshake with Bill Clinton was choreographed, and then cancelled at the last minute by the Iranians. "We were prepared to consider normalizing relations," then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "but there was a question of whether praising him would be good or bad for him domestically. We called it the 'kiss of death' factor."

When he visited the United Nations last November, Khatami held a breakfast with several journalists; I sat across from him, and he seemed a civilized and immaculate presence, arrayed in a brown cloak over a taupe tunic, topped by the black turban that is worn only by descendants of the Prophet Mu-

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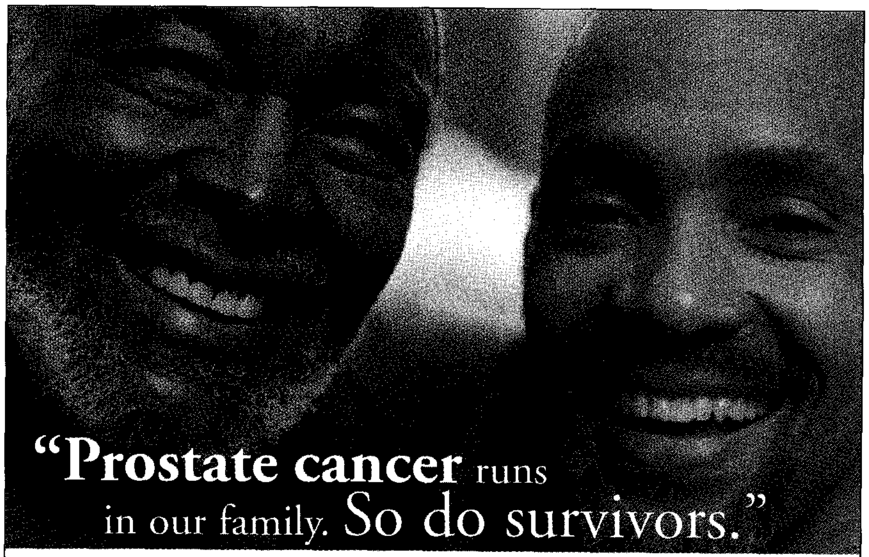
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hammad. He had long, carefully manicured fingers, a turquoise ring on his left hand and an onyx ring on his right. He was cautious when asked about the resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States, less so when asked about the anti-American sentiments commonly heard on the street in Islamic countries. "There is a version of Islam that says, 'Whoever disagrees with me is a disbeliever and must be killed,' " he said. "But there are other versions of Islam. We believe in a version that favors a dialogue of civilizations. . . . We believe that when religion and freedom are put at odds both suffer. Without democracy, religion becomes extreme. With religion, democracy becomes more spiritual."

Khatami's rhetorical elegance had made an immediate impact in Iran after his election. Religious thuggery diminished—in the past, it had not been unusual for the *basij* to hassle women on the street for improper dress, or even to burst into private parties where music was playing. Bolder women now began wearing their head scarves further back, off the brow, to reveal provocative swirls of hair. A new generation of newspapers began to report freely and irreverently about the government; satirists and cartoonists thrived. The conservatives seemed stunned by all this. Khatami was even able to push some reforms through the parliament, which was still dominated by the clerics.

A conservative reaction began late in 1998: the Judiciary, which is controlled by the Supreme Leader, started closing reform newspapers (many of which promptly reopened using different names), and then jailing the journalists causing the trouble. At the end of 1998, five noted intellectuals and political dissidents were killed—Iranians called these the "serial murders." Khatami demanded an investigation, which was generally assumed to be an empty gesture. But, in what remains his greatest triumph as President, there really was an investigation, and in January of 1999 the Ministry of Intelligence and Security announced that "irresponsible, misguided and unruly members of this ministry . . . have committed these criminal acts."

"This was an astonishing moment," said Bijan Khajehpour, who is the managing director of a consulting firm in Tehran. "But it was not decisive. It was an early blow in what has become a fifteen-round championship boxing match. The reformers had some success in the early rounds, but then the conservatives gathered themselves and came back. In 2000, the reformers won a great victory in the parliamentary elections, but the conservatives came back again—far more forcefully, in part because the reformers became overconfident."

Boxing is a popular metaphor among political observers in Tehran. Hadi Semati, the Tehran University political scientist, calls Khatami's current, passive strategy "rope-a-dope." But the power struggle is too complicated to be reduced to a sporting analogy. The common designations "reformers" and "conservatives" are crude approximations. There are dozens of factions. There are also obscure, quietly powerful forces that escape public scrutiny—not just the security apparatus but enormous charitable trusts called *bonyads*, which were created from the private holdings of the Shah and his supporters after the revolution and now constitute a significant portion of the Iranian economy. The "charity" of the *bonyads* encompasses everything from subsidies to the widows and orphans of the Iran-Iraq War to the suspected financial aggrandizement of the clerical establishment and the funding of terrorism. The charitable trusts exist in the semi-official netherworld that provides conspiracists with much of their grist. The Supreme Leader has authority over the *bonyads* and the Revolutionary Guards. Khamenei, however, has a few dusty reform credentials as well: he was one of the Qom clerics who had ties to secular intellectuals before the revolution. "It is possible that the Supreme Leader is not a boxer at all," Bijan Khajehpour said. "It is possible that he is trying to be the referee. After the reformers trounced the conservatives in the parliamentary elections of 2000, and there was a movement to overturn the results, he was the one who said the results should stand."

But Khamenei also undoubtedly gave final approval to the attacks on the reformers that began almost immediately after those elections. The moderates now held the Presidency and the Iranian parliament, which is called the Majlis; they began to speak of amending the Islamic constitution to give elected officials more power. Much of this talk was idle posturing: the Islamic constitution is clogged with checks and balances. There are all sorts of delightfully named committees with the power to block parliamentary initiatives, such as the twelve-member Council of Guardians, a stunted upper house that has direct veto power over the Majlis, and the Expediency Council, which mediates disputes between the Majlis and the Guardians. Given the array of contending forces, inertia seemed a cinch. But the reformers had been elected with overwhelming majorities; the public was clearly tired of the mullahs, and the situation threatened to get out of hand.

In April of 2000, a second wave of attacks on the reformers was launched. Nearly twenty publications were shut down, and there was another round of arrests—a campaign that later broadened to include the interrogation of members of parliament who had criticized the government. The violence began again, too: less than a month after the elections, Saeed Hajjarian—who was among Khatami's closest political advisers—was shot in the head by two men on motorcycles; Hajjarian survived, but the personal impact on Khatami apparently was enormous. He cried at Hajjarian's bedside and despaired as other supporters were taken off to jail. He told friends he was helpless to prevent those arrests; according to several close associates, Khatami's chronic back pain intensified, he became depressed, and said he didn't want to run for reëlection in 2001. "There are times when I'm afraid that he'll have a stroke," his longtime aide Mohammad Abtahi told me. "He suffers so much."

There was a second, less obvious consequence of the reformers' overconfidence: They had attacked Rafsanjani—perhaps the cleverest politician in the country—during an attempt to retain his seat in the Majlis. (The journalist who led the campaign, Akbar Ganji, was jailed.) Infuriated, Rafsanjani drifted from the reform camp toward the conservatives, perhaps carrying the balance of power with him. Akbar

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Karbassian, an economist, told me, "It is said that power in Iran resides wherever Hashemi Rafsanjani happens to be sitting."

Rafsanjani is an instantly recognizable figure. He's the mullah with the round, boyish, beardless face and a benign tuft of hair peeking out from beneath his turban. He is a living monument to the absurdity of the relations between the United States and Iran since the revolution, and has always played the same role: the moderate who promises rationality but never quite succeeds in delivering it. "He was the speaker of parliament trying to broker a deal during the hostage crisis," says Jim Steinberg, the director of the Foreign Policy Studies Program at the Brookings Institution, who worked for both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Rafsanjani's sensibility is, essentially, that of a Chinese mandarin: he is from a wealthy pistachio-growing family, a believer in a free market in everything but ideas. As President, he began the privatization of the economy, and he also attempted a rapprochement with the United States on terms that he assumed would be most attractive: in 1995, he selected Conoco's offer of a billion dollars to develop Iran's offshore oil fields. The reaction from the Clinton Administration—which was not attentive to the nuances of Iranian politics and had embarked on a counterproductive, if symmetrical, policy of "dual containment" toward Iran and Iraq—was outrage. Conoco was ordered to void the deal; a new and even more punitive set of economic sanctions was hustled through Congress. Rafsanjani was left to ruminate on the perils of moderation.

I saw Rafsanjani speak in Tehran on Friday, December 14th, on the occasion of Jerusalem Day, the Islamic world's annual anti-Zionist festival. He spoke at the Friday prayers at Tehran University, which has been the most important platform for Iran's religious leadership since the revolution. In the old days, it wasn't hard to raise a crowd from the Islamic radicals on campus; but most of the radicals are secular humanists now, and so the crowd has to be bused in from mosques around town. The mullahs often have difficulty filling the vast open-air pavilion. On Jerusalem Day, the space was crowded, however: perhaps five thousand of the faithful, all men—the women were shunted off to an adjacent area—shoeless, kneeling or sitting cross-legged on prayer rugs. It was a peculiar crowd, rebels subdued by age and weary in their chanted responses. On both sides of the stage, electric signs with multicolored lights linked the names of the Prophet and two Shiite heroes, Husayn and Zahra.

I had joined marchers from a mosque in Jihad Square—twenty-six of them, by my count—as they made their way through town chanting "God is great," "Death to Israel," "Death to America," and, no doubt in homage to great Satans past, "Death to England." The women were in full chadors; the men were dressed shabbily, with stubbly beards, fingering worry beads—it seemed a procession of nuns and aging clerical custodians. Similar marches had been launched throughout Tehran; busloads of pilgrims were imported from surrounding communities.

It was a mild, sunny day, and when all the rivulets converged on Enghelab Avenue, in front of the university, I fell in behind two veterans of the Iran-Iraq War, dressed in camouflage fatigues, who were atop a slow-moving minivan. One of the men was brandishing a Kalashnikov and wearing a kaffiyeh in solidarity with the Palestinians; the other was waving a green Islamic flag and trying to lead the usual chants. The minivan halted for a moment, and the man with the Kalashnikov began to speak. "My friend here was chemically disabled in the Iraq war," he said, nodding at his thin, haggard comrade, who was on his knees and sweating profusely. "Please support the disabled. Don't consider us beggars. We fought for our country." He began to sob, and, I noticed, several of the men in my immediate vicinity had tears streaming down their cheeks. "We're Shiites! Don't abandon us.... *Marg bar Amrika! Marg bar Amrika!*"

A bedsheet with a crudely drawn American flag was produced and set aflame; television cameras converged. It was the scene we've watched a thousand times, but not at all threatening somehow: a theatrical moment rather than a political one. I noticed that we were standing in front of a cinema where "The Green Mile" was playing.

The Friday prayer sermons cling to several atavistic rituals from the revolutionary days. As the main speaker takes the stage, he is handed an assault rifle—a prop that seemed particularly ridiculous in the hands of Hashemi Rafsanjani, who spoke softly and leaned the rifle beneath the lectern throughout his speech. "The arrogant United States provided weapons of mass destruction to the Zionists," he said, inaccurately (it was France that helped the Israeli nuclear program). "If the day comes when the Islamic countries have those same weapons, the strategy of arrogance will be at an end."

These inflammatory words were delivered quietly, almost perfunctorily. The entire Jerusalem Day spectacle seemed an attempt by the conservatives to identify a common enemy in order to shift the nation's attention from the intramural political struggles. "But many of the hard-liners really do believe that Palestine is critical to Iran's national-security interests," Kenneth Pollack, of the Council on Foreign Relations, said. "It is seen as a way to fight the United States, which, they believe, is an implacable enemy, intent on overturning the Islamic Republic. And they obviously have the power to act on their beliefs."

A few days later, I was granted an interview with Mohammad Hashemi, Rafsanjani's younger brother and shadowy force emeritus—former Vice-President and former chairman of the state-run radio and television organization. We met in a palace built by the Shah for his sister, part of a campus of palaces in a lovely grove of birch and pine north of Tehran. He received me in a room off the garden; pale-green silk wallpaper framed crystal chandeliers and the requisite grand Persian carpet. Tea, sweets, and bowls of almonds and pistachios were provided. Hashemi, who had silver hair and a dark mustache and the soft, knowing manner of a born

Inspiration: Attitude

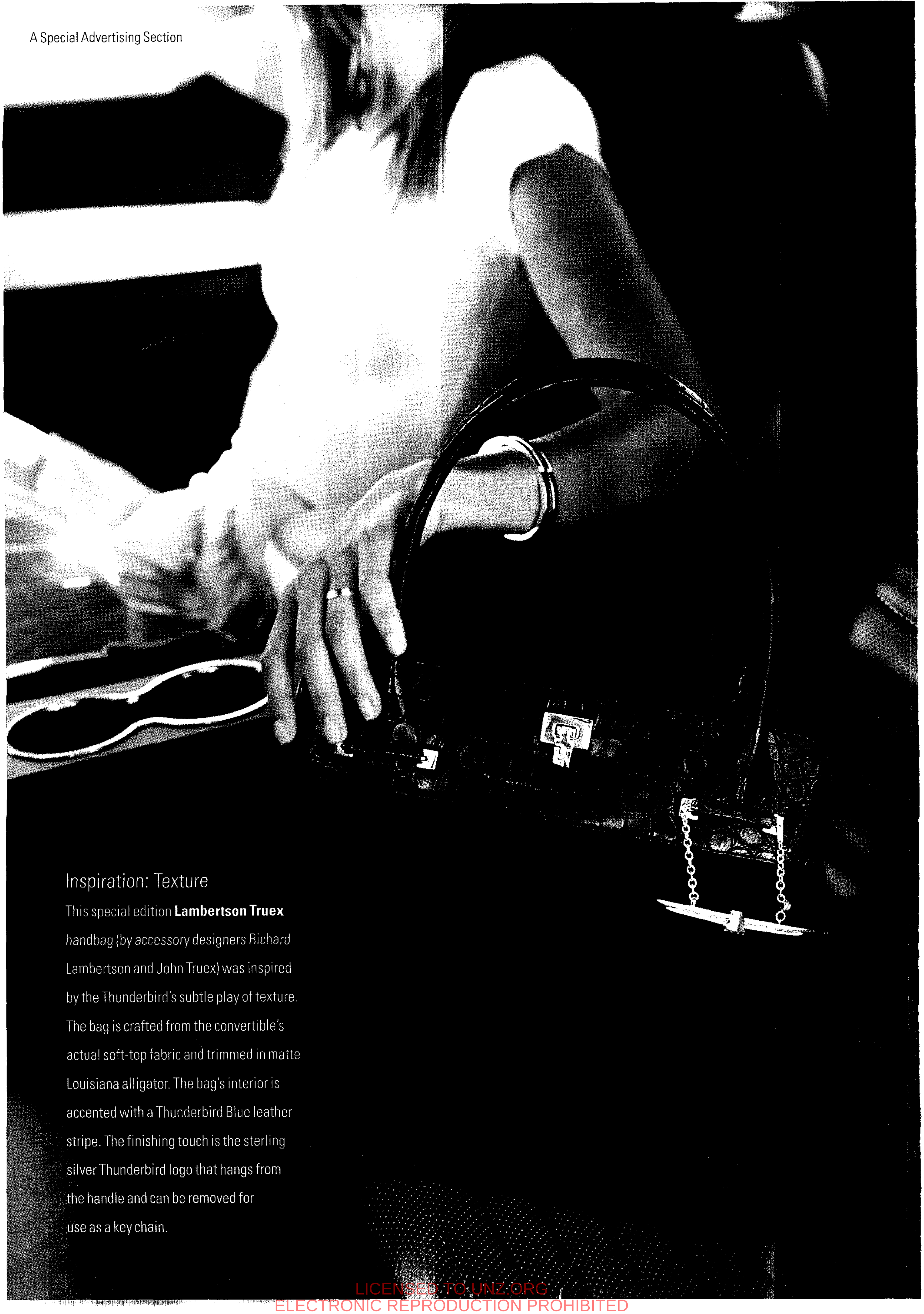
Designer **William Reid** found inspiration in *Thunderbird's personality*. Here, he tops sexy, comfortable, all-American denim with pieces that are dressy and refined. The metallic details on her top echo the chrome accents on the Thunderbird.

The Road to Inspiration

It's not easy to stop today's top designers in their tracks. They've seen and done it all. But when eight of America's reigning fashion icons laid eyes on the 2002 Ford Thunderbird, inspiration struck. Here are the fashions kindled by the look and feel of the American dream car.

Inspiration: Geometry

The influence of Thunderbird's sloping angles and bold color palette are seen in this **Carolina Herrera** ensemble. The draping fabric, with its elegant flowing lines, evokes images of a romantic weekend getaway. The Torch Red accessories add a touch of drama against a background of Evening Black and Whisper White.



Inspiration: Texture

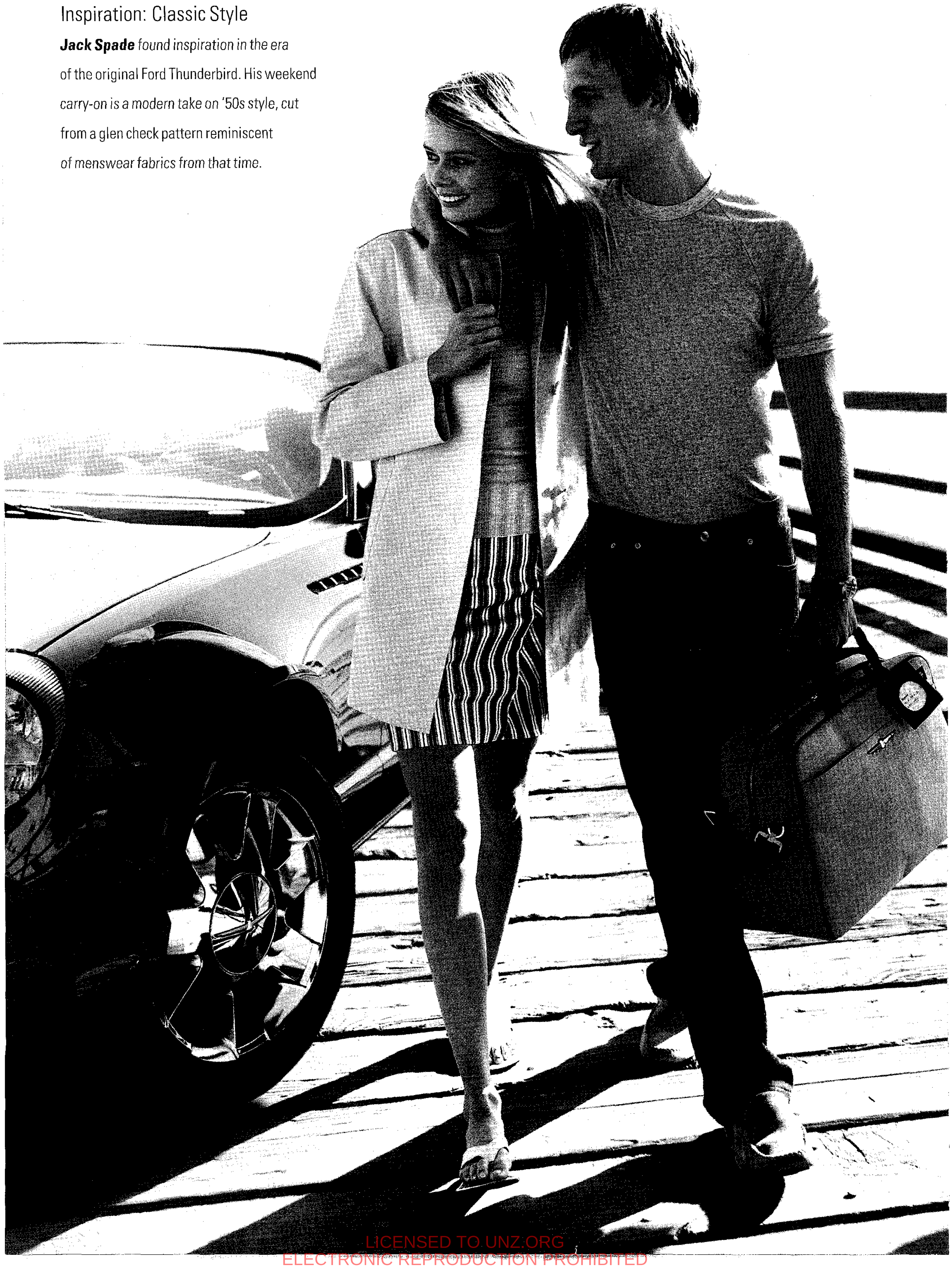
This special edition **Lambertson Truex** *handbag* (by accessory designers Richard Lambertson and John Truex) was inspired by the Thunderbird's subtle play of texture. The bag is crafted from the convertible's actual soft-top fabric and trimmed in matte Louisiana alligator. The bag's interior is accented with a Thunderbird Blue leather stripe. The finishing touch is the sterling silver Thunderbird logo that hangs from the handle and can be removed for use as a key chain.

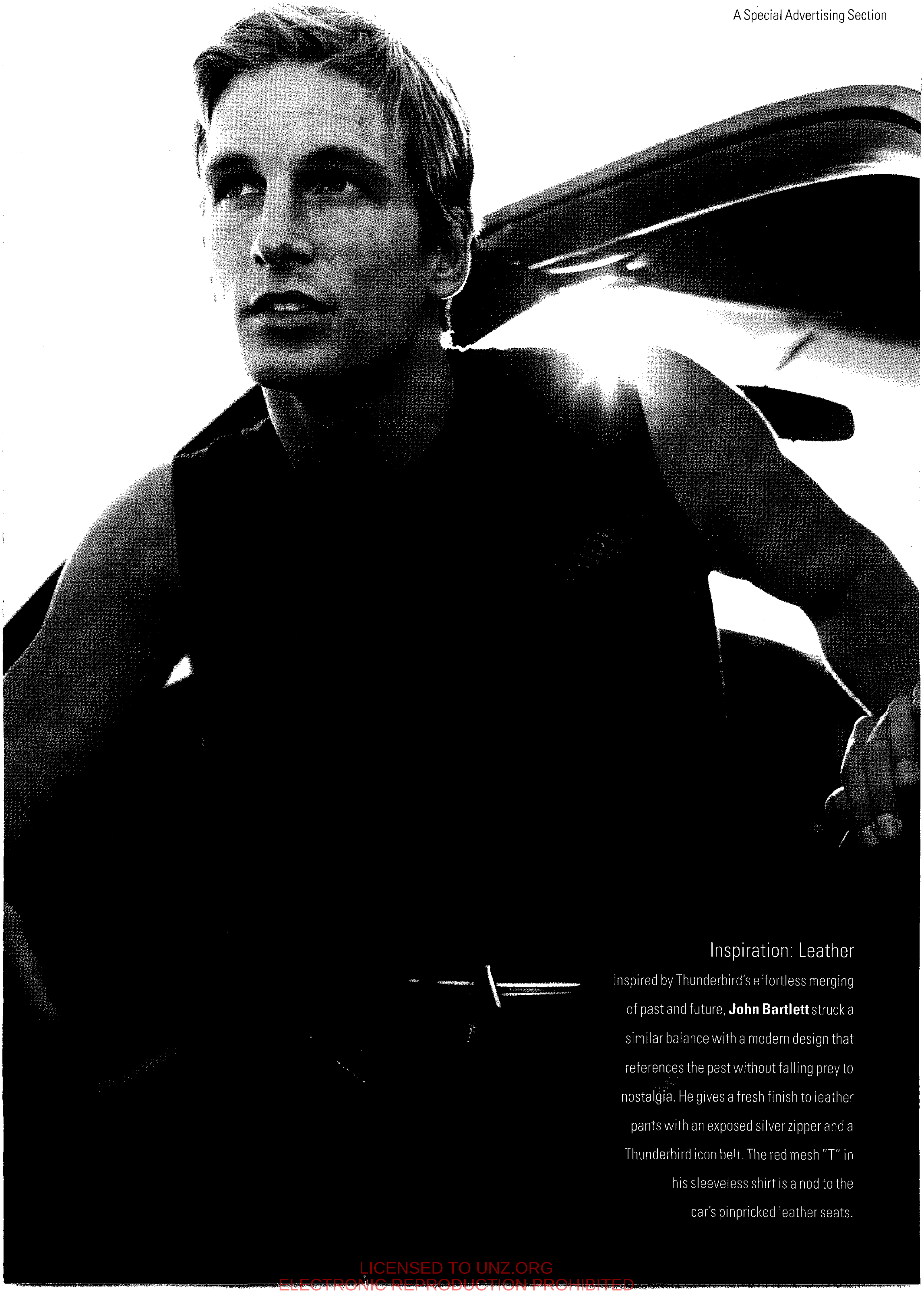
Inspiration: Hue

Designer **Gene Meyer** pays homage to the Thunderbird by throwing subtlety out the porthole window. His sporty leather jacket draws on the Thunderbird's playful hues with bold, angular blocks of color. He even had the Thunderbird emblem embossed on the chest. (Momentarily hidden.)

Inspiration: Classic Style

Jack Spade *found inspiration in the era* of the original Ford Thunderbird. His weekend *carry-on is a modern take on '50s style, cut* from a glen check pattern reminiscent *of menswear fabrics from that time.*





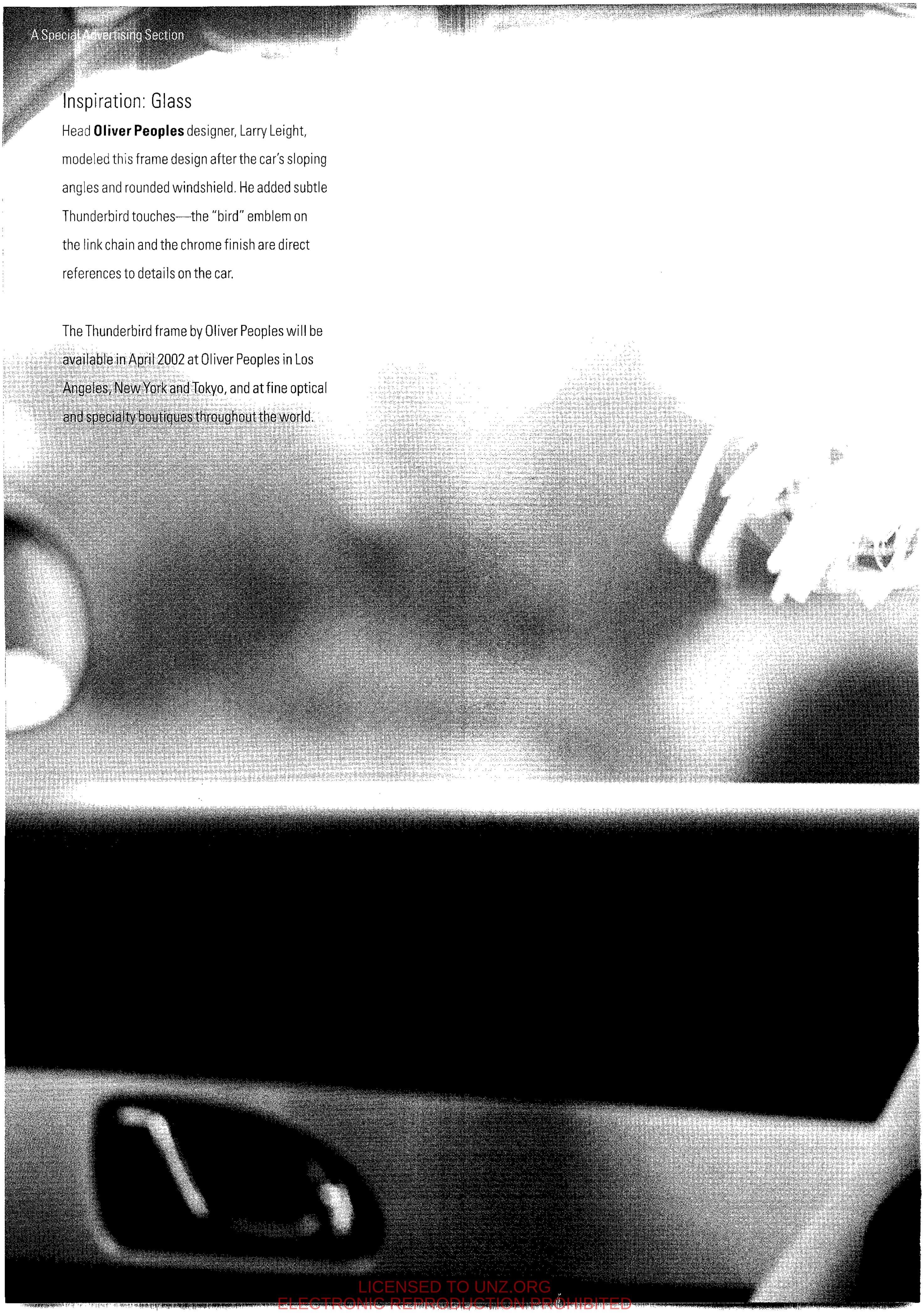
Inspiration: Leather

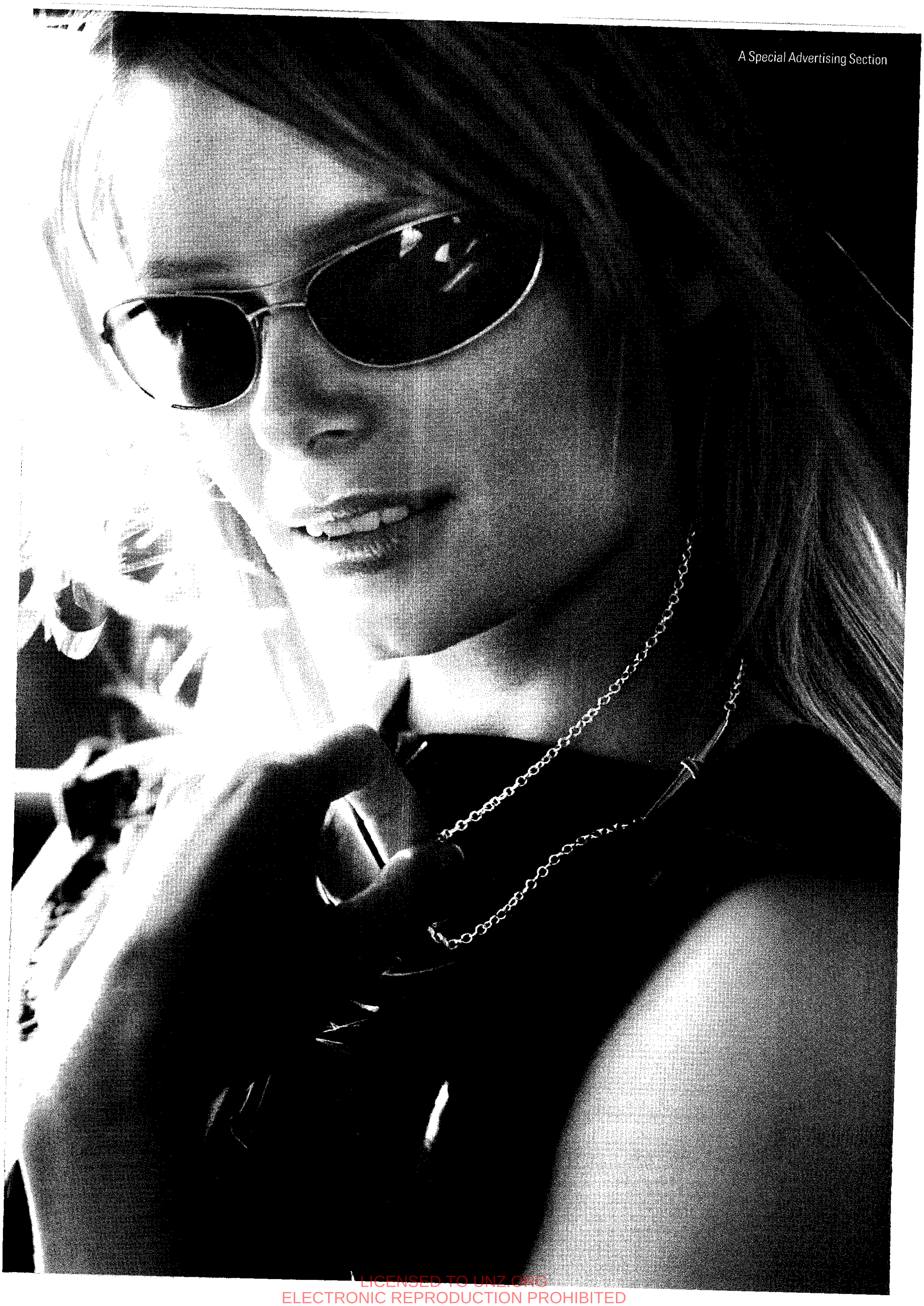
Inspired by Thunderbird's effortless merging of past and future, **John Bartlett** struck a similar balance with a modern design that references the past without falling prey to nostalgia. He gives a fresh finish to leather pants with an exposed silver zipper and a Thunderbird icon belt. The red mesh "T" in his sleeveless shirt is a nod to the car's pinpricked leather seats.

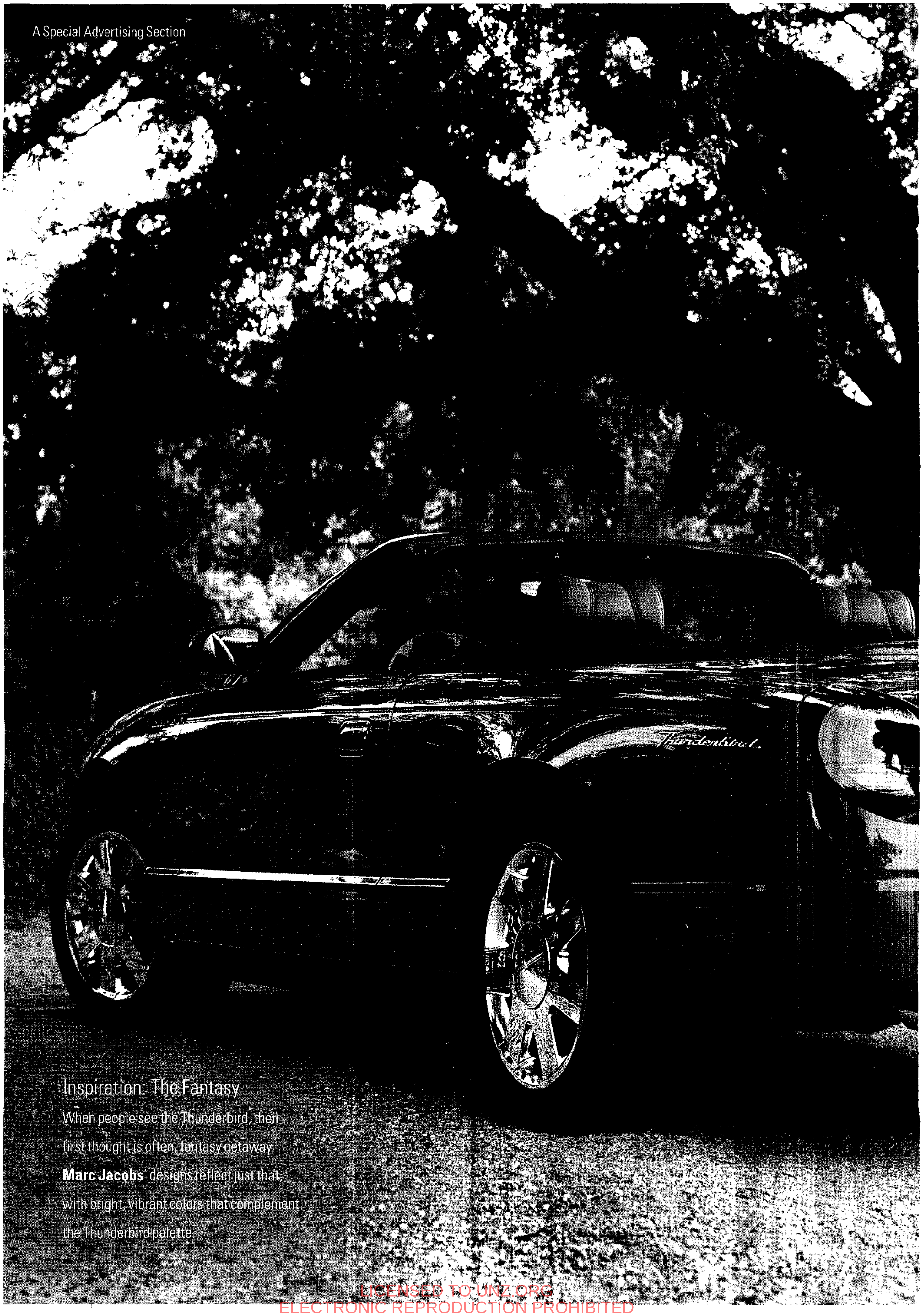
Inspiration: Glass

Head **Oliver Peoples** designer, Larry Leight, modeled this frame design after the car's sloping angles and rounded windshield. He added subtle Thunderbird touches—the "bird" emblem on the link chain and the chrome finish are direct references to details on the car.

The Thunderbird frame by Oliver Peoples will be available in April 2002 at Oliver Peoples in Los Angeles, New York and Tokyo, and at fine optical and specialty boutiques throughout the world.



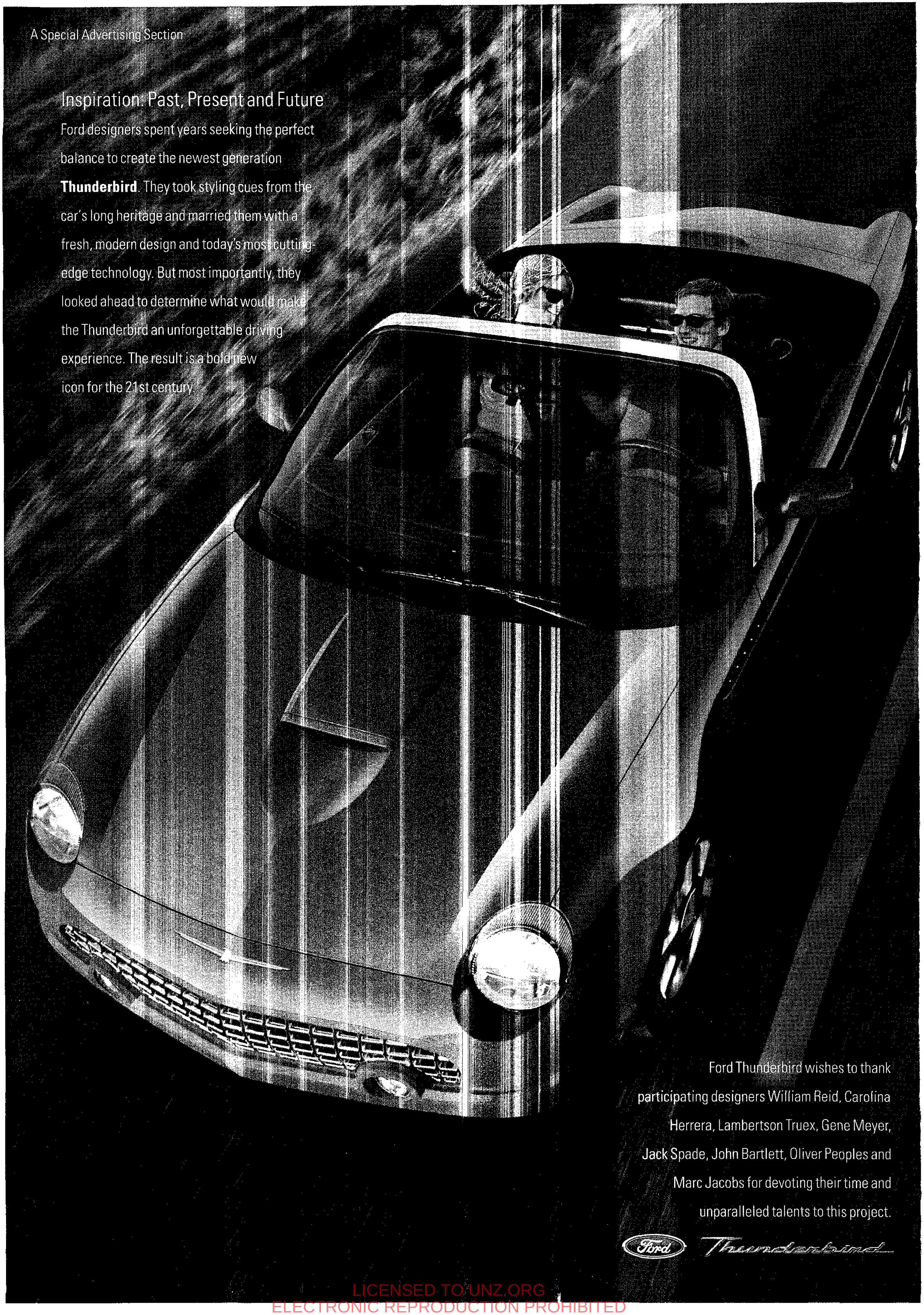




Inspiration: The Fantasy

When people see the Thunderbird, their first thought is often, fantasy getaway. **Marc Jacobs'** designs reflect just that, with bright, vibrant colors that complement the Thunderbird palette.

LF 150



Inspiration: Past, Present and Future

Ford designers spent years seeking the perfect balance to create the newest generation **Thunderbird**. They took styling cues from the car's long heritage and married them with a fresh, modern design and today's most cutting-edge technology. But most importantly, they looked ahead to determine what would make the Thunderbird an unforgettable driving experience. The result is a bold new icon for the 21st century.

Ford Thunderbird wishes to thank participating designers William Reid, Carolina Herrera, Lambertson Truex, Gene Meyer, Jack Spade, John Bartlett, Oliver Peoples and Marc Jacobs for devoting their time and unparalleled talents to this project.

Ford Thunderbird

WINE STEWARDS WITHOUT BORDERS

fixer, immediately announced the end of the reform movement. "They entered the stage with nothing but slogans. This attracted the attention of the public, particularly the young people. But they paid little attention to the most important issues of economic construction and development. They have not delivered on anything. They have alienated many of the country's leaders, and so reform is now at a dead end."

After a discussion about the stagnating economy, I asked Hashemi about his brother. He sighed. "He was attacked from both sides. The conservatives said that Khatami was his fruit," he said, noting that Rafsanjani's supporters in the Construction Party had backed Khatami for President. "And the reformers attacked him in the press, as you know. Today, that situation has changed. Both sides realize that Rafsanjani is a man for the country, not for any particular faction. Both sides are trying to impress him again."

This last appears to be quite true, even though Rafsanjani's reputation remains tarnished. The more moderate reformers freely admit that alienating Rafsanjani was a big mistake. "The Rafsanjani-reformist coalition would have been in a better position to move the reform agenda forward," Bijan Khajehpour, the business consultant, said.

Indeed, toward the end of the year, many reformers had grown introspective—trying to figure out where they'd gone wrong, what to do next. There were disputes about strategy. The Khatami forces had proposed an oxymoron: "active calm." More recently, some reform factions had proposed "active resistance." By then, more than fifty members of the parliament had been summoned before the Judiciary and the sentencing of several seemed imminent. Khatami was out of sight, said to be ill but most likely suffering through another period of low spirits. "He's come to the conclusion that reform simply isn't possible right now," one of the President's associates said. "The power points are not at his disposal, and the practical power of the non-elected element is increasing."

Then, in late December, it was announced that Khatami would go to Tehran University and speak to the students. In anticipation of the meeting, the President had said that if the views of students weren't heeded there would be an "explosion." Some of his followers hoped this was an indication that he finally intended to provide the spark. Those closest to Khatami, however, were not only dubious but quite candid about their disappointment in him. Several days before the speech, I visited Zahra Eshraqi, an official at the Ministry of the Interior, who is married to Khatami's brother Mohammad Reza, the Deputy Speaker of the Majlis; she is also the granddaughter of Ayatollah Khomeini and has inherited some of the old man's fire, if not his politics. "The President has a very strong character. He is very calm," Mrs. Eshraqi, who is in her late thirties and was wearing what looked like a Burberry scarf, said. "Sometimes I want him to get angry, to speak out against the opposition. I say the same to my husband. The Judiciary are like the Saudis!" she said, meaning that they were extremely conservative. "They are going to throw members of parliament in jail! React to them!" She continued, with a pleasant smile and a shrug, "What happens now depends on Mr. Khatami. But, no matter what he does, this country is not going back to the past. We'll see if the future is more clear when he speaks on Saturday."

The hall at Tehran University was already filled when I arrived at nine in the morning on Saturday, December 22nd. It was a relatively small room, with seats for about a thousand; the walls were lined with photos of university students who had been martyred in the Iraq war. Women and men were segregated in the room, but both were equally vehement. "In Kabul, in Tehran, down with the Taliban!" they chanted, and, in a reference to the head of the Judiciary, Mahmoud Shahroudi, "Shahroudi, Iraqi, resign, resign!" Soon it was clear that a scuffle was taking place outside the doors. There were screams and fierce pounding—and then, at about nine-fifteen, the rear door gave and hundreds more students crashed into the room, filling the aisles. One small group went after the Iran TV cameras, overturning them, causing the cameramen to flee. Security seemed remarkably lax, and I wondered if this chaos was precisely the image that the conservatives wanted the country to see.

Khatami arrived a half hour later, precipitating another explosion. The students chanted, "Khatami, Khatami, honesty, honesty," and a second scuffle broke out. This time, the door on the women's side of the auditorium was breached; there was frantic screaming as verses from the Koran, the standard introduction to public meetings, were read. The mayhem seemed to intensify as Khatami took the stage, but the President remained unperturbed. He looked as elegant as ever, in a black cloak and charcoal-gray tunic, his black turban tilted high on his brow. "I have a cold," he told the students. "So please be quiet. Calm down, calm down."

He began what seemed a rambling introduction; he spoke of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"Change this place first!" a heckler shouted, referring to the crowded room. Many of the students laughed.

"O.K., O.K.," the President said. "Tolerance! Tolerance!"

"For the sake of Khatami," the women's section began to chant, "we will be tolerant!" That seemed to quiet everybody down, and the President proceeded. He was sweating and dabbed his brow with a crumpled white handkerchief; his cloak slipped off one shoulder. "You shouldn't be expecting a champion," he said. "In a democracy, the people are the champions. If we are defeated, my defeat, or my victory, is not yours. It's not the public's defeat."

That didn't sound very encouraging. Later, he spoke of Socrates. "He was a philosopher, accused of seducing the youth of Athens," the President said. "He was tried and convicted, and he drank poison in order to maintain the respect for law and order in society."

The overpowering impression was of a defeated man, a tragic figure begging for sympathy. Afterward, the students were more disappointed than compassionate. "That was very weak," Ali Reza, a twenty-year-old philosophy major, said, expressing the unanimous opinion of those milling outside the hall after the speech. "These were all things he'd said before. We need a President more radical than him."

One rainy December evening in Tehran, I went to a coffeehouse with four young women, three of them university students and one a recent graduate. All four spoke excellent English, which they had learned in school. They appeared to be supremely indifferent to politics. We talked about movies (they had just seen pirated DVDs of "Harry Potter"), poetry—the Sufi poets are a national obsession—and fashion. All four wore their head scarves at the very crown of their heads, showing lots of dark, gleaming hair; the scarves were set so far back that they were continually slipping off and the women seemed in constant motion, tying and retying them. "Can't you just pin them in place?" I asked.

The women giggled and shot conspiratorial glances at each other. "I have a friend," Zahra, a chemical engineer, said, "a boy. He says that boys find it sensual."

"Everyone has her own style of scarf adjustment," Hasti, a business student, said. I asked for a demonstration, but the women refused, saying that it had to be done unconsciously. (I did pay attention thereafter and noticed that several of them had fairly brazen styles, winging out their scarves before retying them, so that their heads were almost bare for a moment.)

It occurred to me that these women were emblematic of a basic, underappreciated human truth: the ability of average people to blithely confound the intentions of ideologues. The purpose of *hejab*, the Islamic dress code, was to impose a near-anonymous sexual modesty upon women. But the compulsory imposition of the law had created a delightfully unintended consequence: in Iran, women's dress was now more revealing than men's. In fact, Iranian men seemed universally unexceptional. The flashier guys had a slightly retro, "Saturday Night Fever" pompadour-and-leather look; most wore the casual uniform of young men everywhere—jackets with athletic logos, jeans, sneakers. But every Iranian woman made a political or social statement simply by where she placed her scarf on her head and how long her cloak was (some now wear waist-length coats, jeans, and high-heeled boots). There were simply too many women, in all parts of the country, making political fashion statements for the mullahs to have any hope of reimposing conformity.

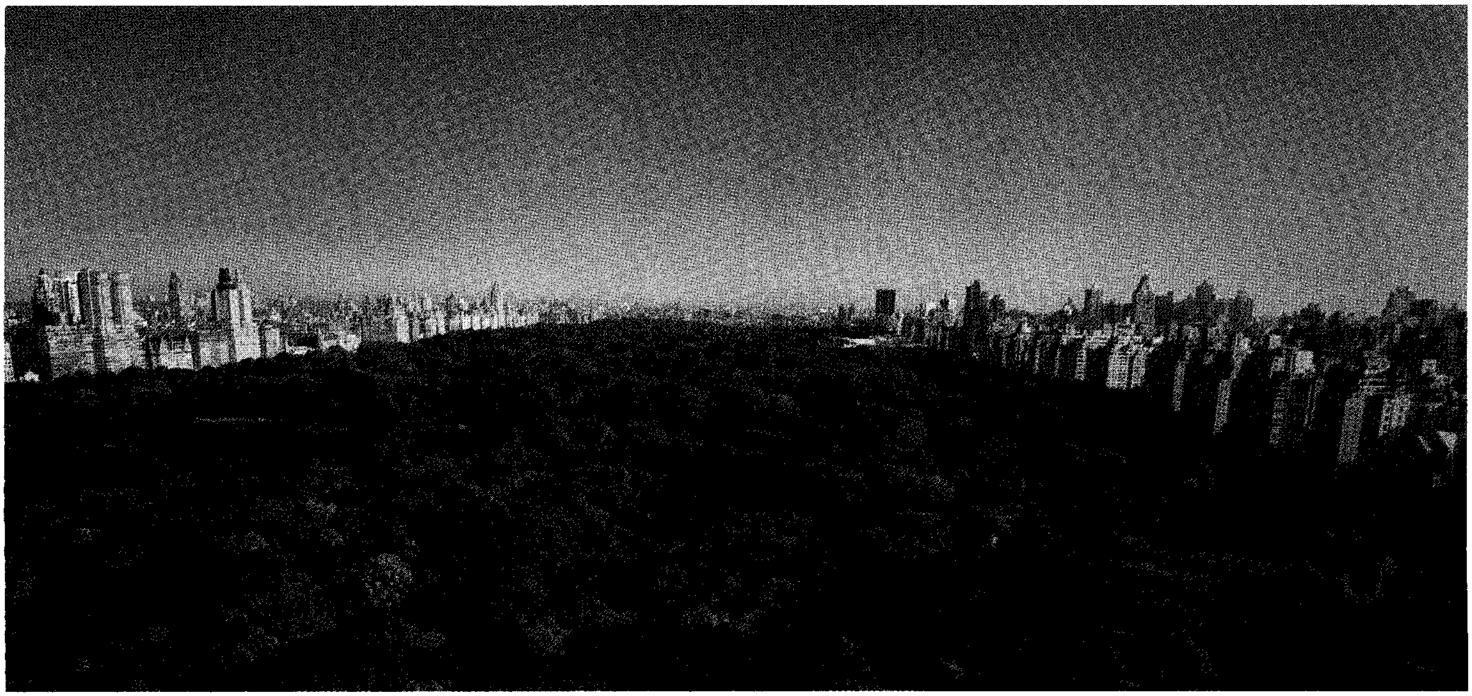
"Three of us went to Turkey last summer with our parents," Azra, an architecture student, said. "We didn't have to wear our scarves, but I just couldn't take mine off at first. It felt uncomfortable."

"But you did take it off," Hasti reminded her. "And it was very thrilling."

Azra nodded and smiled. "And when we returned home," she said, "it was hard to put it on again."

The women agreed that it was difficult to imagine a day when they'd be able to walk scarfless through the streets of Tehran; they couldn't provide a scenario for the political changes that would need to take place—and they were not alone. No one in Iran seemed able to describe a credible path from Islamic Republic to Islamic democracy. What distinguished these young women, however—and the young people I'd spoken with at the university and on the poor side of town—was a serene confidence that the conservative position was absurd and untenable, that reform would come, that Iran would eventually rejoin the world. At the end of our time together, they insisted on publicly shaking my hand—an unthinkable heresy, an act that could have meant jail if the wrong people had been watching. But no one was watching, and these handshakes—halting, delicate, nervous—were an exhilarating moment of political rebellion.

A few weeks later, the conservative onslaught seemed to reach its apogee: one of the members of the Majlis who was accused of inflammatory rhetoric was convicted and sentenced, and was about to be carted off to jail. The Speaker, Mehdi Karroubi, staged a walkout and took most of the Majlis with him. Ayatollah Khamenei, acting as a referee once more, pardoned the parliamentarian—a perfectly Persian solution, conveying the message that, even if members of parliament didn't quite enjoy freedom of speech, they couldn't be jailed for speaking freely. Iran's limited democracy had withstood a serious challenge and continued to limp along, in the general direction of freedom. ♦



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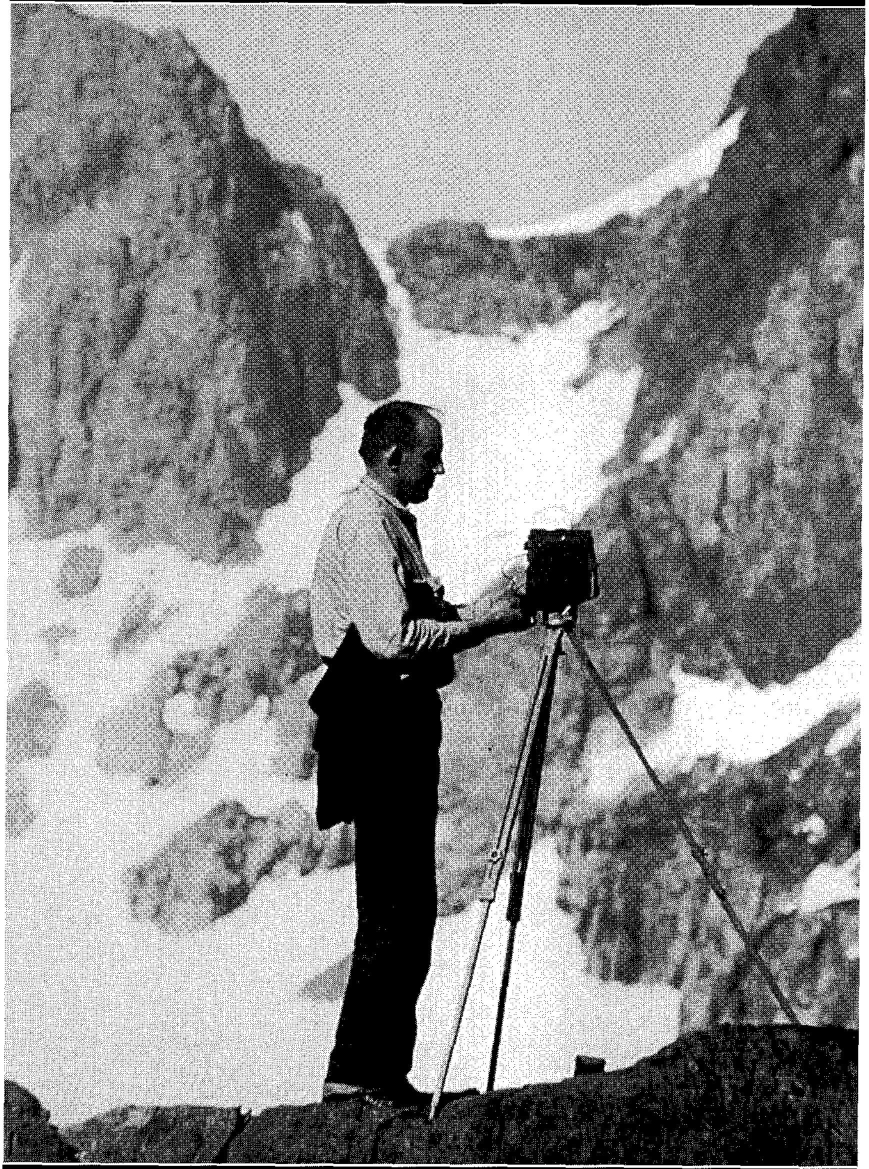
"If you build it they will come" became the mantra of civic boosters and arts patrons in the 1990s. Plans for new museums, especially, proliferated as attendance rose worldwide. Frank Gehry's eye-popping design for the Guggenheim Bilbao showed how, in 1997, a new attraction could put a small Spanish city on the cultural tourism map.

Though the trend is global, the timing of new construction plans brought to fruition favors American cities this year. New York alone has two new must-sees. In November, the Neue Galerie (212-628-6200, www.neuegalerie.org) brought to the city's "Museum Mile" an exquisite showcase for twentieth-century German and

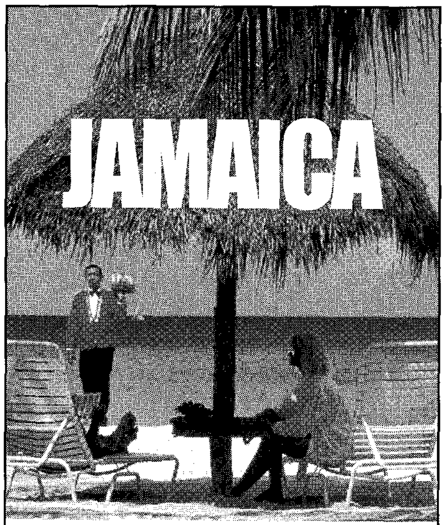
the big picture

BY NAO HAUSER



Gelatin silver print of Adams ©Rondal Partridge

AESTHETIC REPRISE
More than a hundred works of Ansel Adams are being culled from important public and private collections for The Art Institute of Chicago's centennial commemoration of the photographer.



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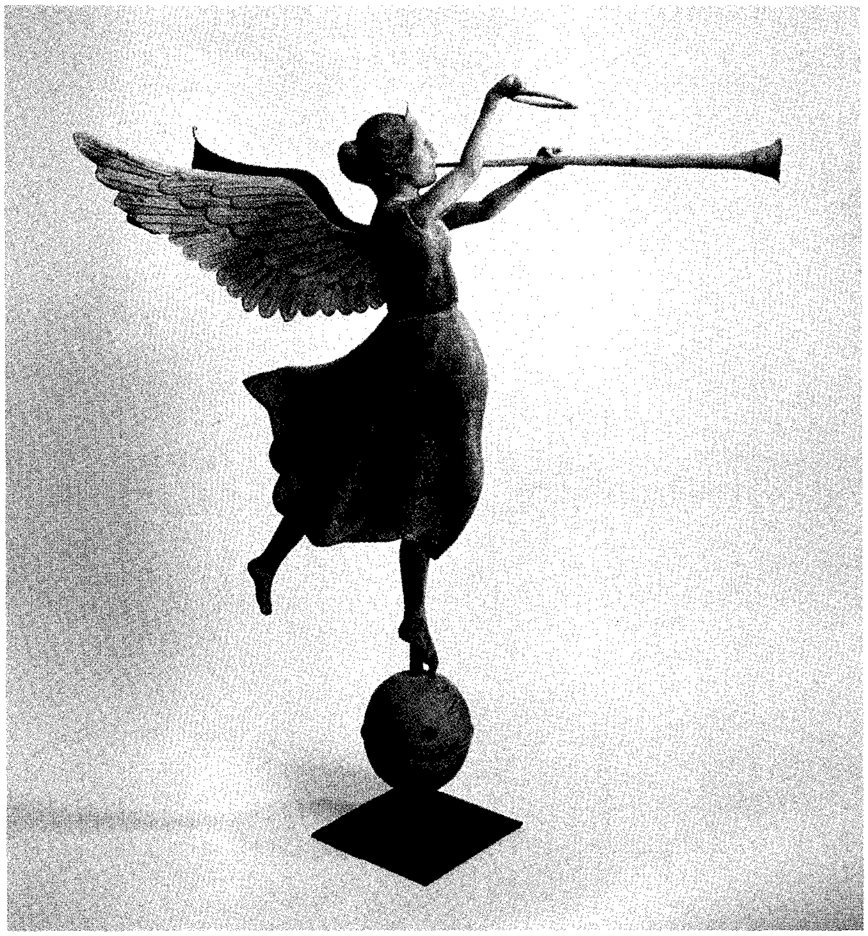
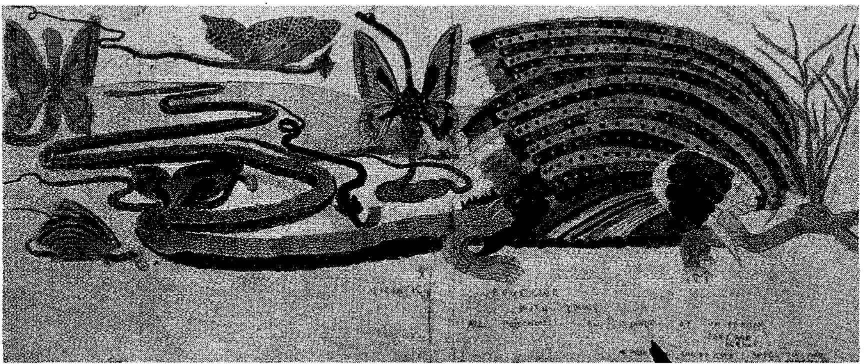


Austrian art in a Beaux Arts building by Carrère & Hastings. The permanent collection, drawn from works owned by founders Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky, provides seven of the paintings for the museum's second show, "Oskar Kokoschka: Early Portraits from Vienna and Berlin, 1909–1914" (March 15–June 10).

In a wonderful duet of stylistic contrasts, the American Folk Art Museum (212-977-7170, www.folkartmuseum.org) opened in December in a contemporary landmark building by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien on 53rd Street, neighboring the Museum of Modern Art. Both spacious, as well as intimate and warm, the eight-level museum has two shows of its primary holdings through June. "American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum" displays a selection from

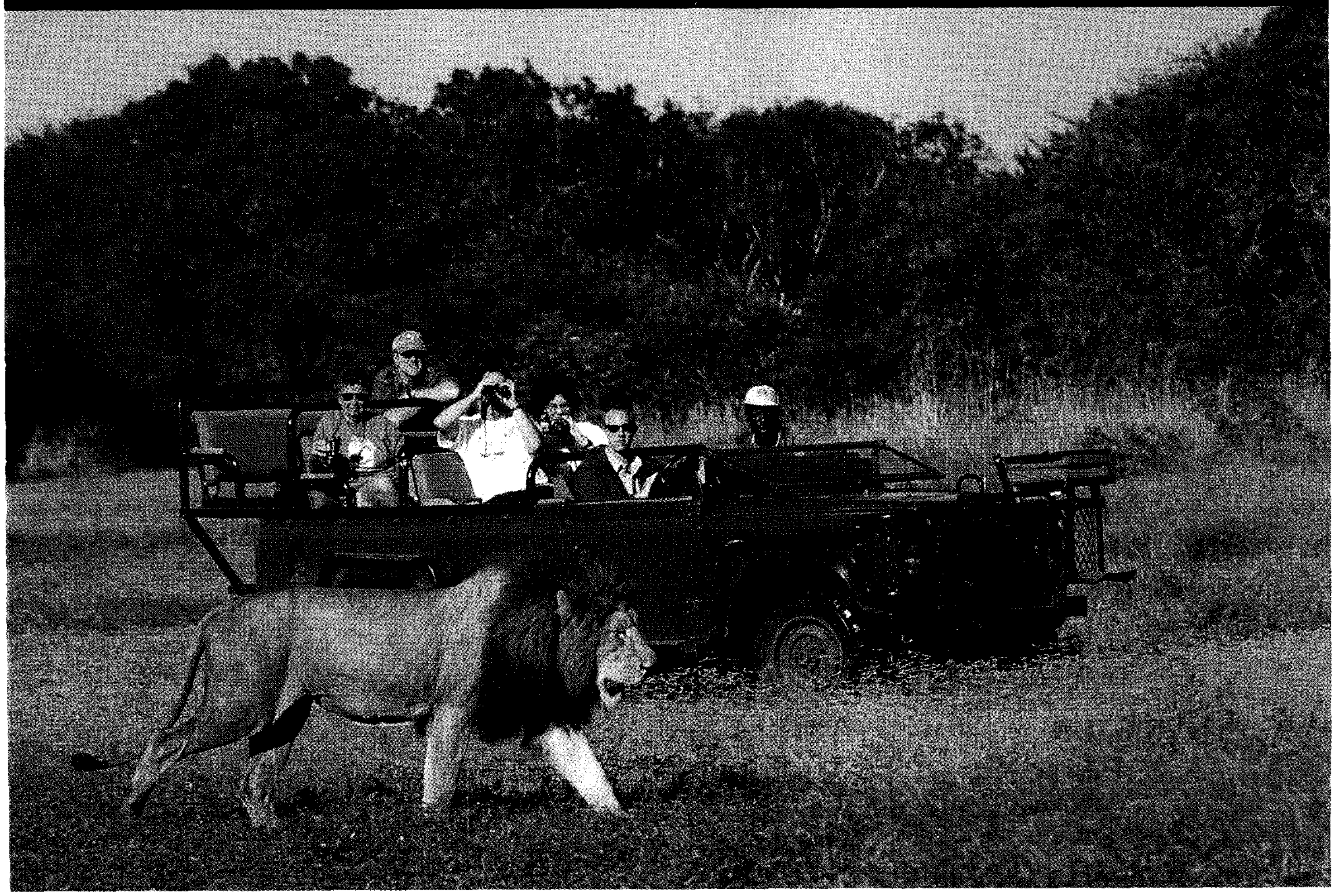


courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum

NEW FACE FOR FOLK ART

The new American Folk Art Museum houses a stunning collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings, quilts, and *(top)* sculptures, among them, the largest repository *(below)* of works by Henry Darger.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.



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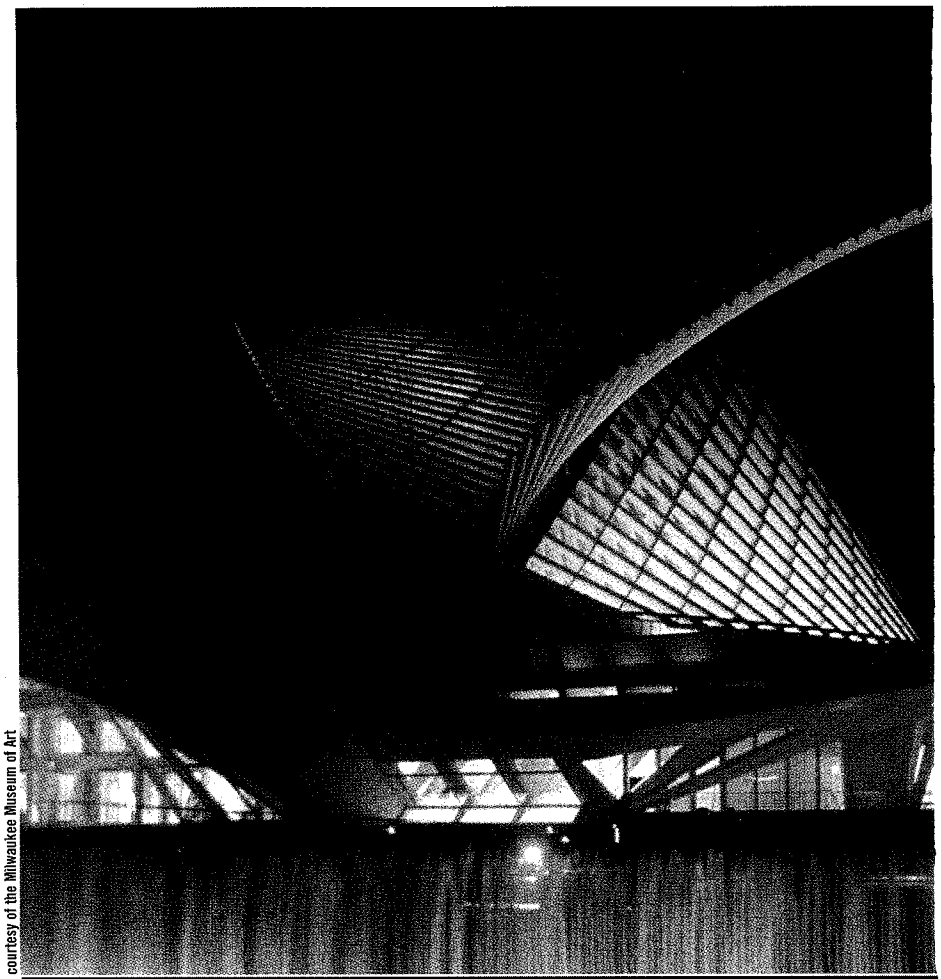
Esmerian's peerless collection—everything from Pennsylvania German pottery to paintings and sculpture. The other show includes twenty-six mural-size watercolors by twentieth-century, self-taught, outsider artist Henry Darger.

In harmony with the cultural vitality of its setting, the new Ritz-Carlton on Central Park South (800-241-3333, www.ritzcarlton.com)—only blocks from the Folk Art Museum, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center—will install in its public spaces a remarkable collection of paintings by the French-trained American artist Samuel Halpert (1884-1930). The twenty-one landscapes and still lifes, including "Central Park in the Snow" and "Times Square," demonstrate the celebrated artist's city views (his "Flatiron Building" is an icon held by the Museum of Modern Art) and his Fauvist-influenced use of color. With Central Park at its doorstep, the hotel will also be a neighbor to this year's Whitney Biennial (March 7–May 26; 212-570-3600, www.whitney.org), which in conjunction with the Public Art Fund, will, for the first time, install some pieces in the park, including sculptures by Kiki Smith and Roxy Paine.

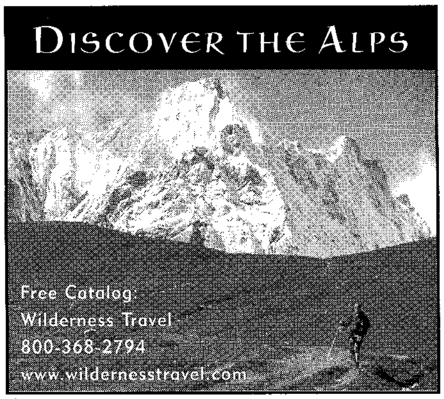
Quickly becoming icons in their own ways, three more new or expanded museums have had major openings across the country. The soaring addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum (414-224-3200, www.mam.org) alighted like a giant gull on Lake Michigan with "wings" designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava to modulate sunlight. The structure draws deserved attention to the museum's permanent collection of American and European paintings, as well as to shows such as "Empire of the Sultan: Islamic Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collections" (February 22–April 28). In Fort Worth, Texas, the Amon Carter Museum (817-738-1933, www.cartermuseum.org)



courtesy of the Milwaukee Museum of Art

WINGED VICTORY

Architect Santiago Calatrava's show-stopping new addition to the Milwaukee Museum of Art has functional wings



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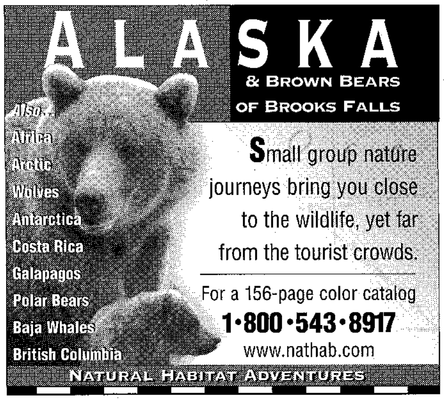

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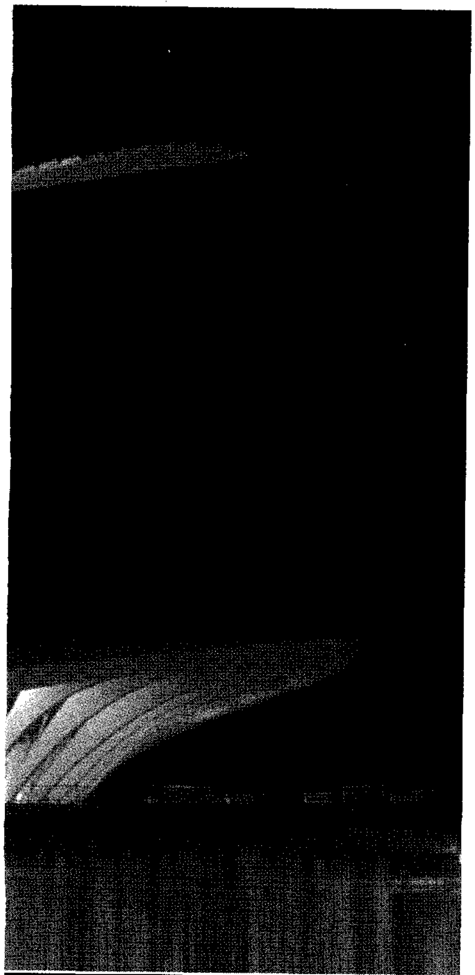
reopened in October with enough new space designed by Philip Johnson to display not only its famous Remingtons and Russells but also its major collections of American photography, painting, and sculpture.

Farther west, in a somewhat surrealistic juxtaposition, the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum (702-414-2440, www.guggenheimlasvegas.org) opened in the Las Vegas Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino with a selection of forty-five magnificent Impressionist and early-modern paintings drawn from the permanent collections of both the Guggenheim and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Good fortune attends the visitor who steals away from the casino frenzy to contemplate, in this tranquil space, major works by Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne, Chagall, and Kandinsky, among others.



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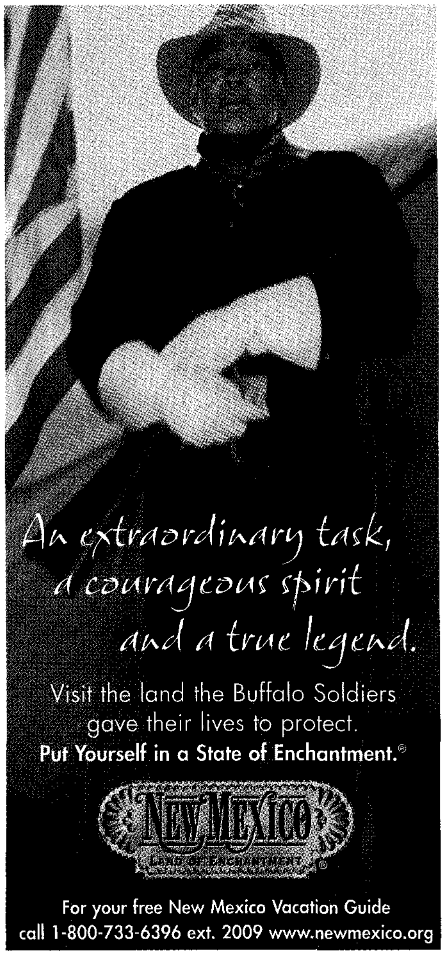

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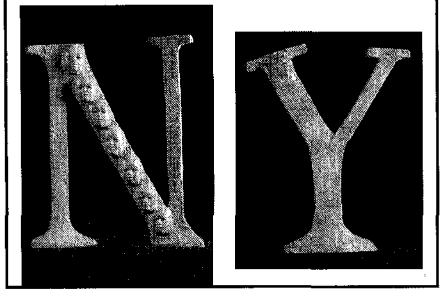

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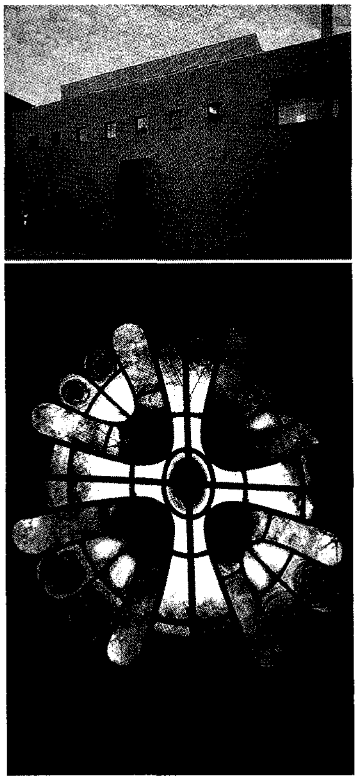
ART NEWS: EUROPE

Those who love the work of the Austrian modernists were fortunate this year. Not only is Kokoschka installed in Manhattan's Neue Galerie, but the Leopold Museum (www.leopoldmuseum.at) has opened in Vienna with the world's largest Egon Schiele collection among its five thousand works, which also include paintings by Klimt and objets d'art by the Wiener Werkstätte. In Berlin, the reopening of the Alte Nationalgalerie (www.visits-to-germany.com, 212-661-7200), after almost four years of reconstruction, invites art-lovers again to its trove of nineteenth-century paintings, including works by Manet, Monet, Renoir, Degas, and Cézanne.

The focus is on design in London, where the Victoria and Albert Museum (www.vam.ac.uk) recently opened nearly an acre of new galleries—fifteen rooms that trace British design and decorative arts from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. There are five historic interiors, including that of a 1740s London drawing room, and some three thousand objects, such as the embroidered suit worn by James II at his 1673 wedding to Mary of Modena. More contemporary fashion statements will be featured in Zandra Rhodes' Fashion and Textile Museum, due to open in September.



TECHNICOLOR EXTERIORS
(Top) Making a splash on London's East End, the Fashion & Textile Museum salutes Brit and international designers. *(Below)* A Gaudí window in Barcelona.

Contemporary art cognoscenti welcomed the Paris début, a few weeks ago, of some forty three thousand square feet of exhibition space, open from noon to midnight, at the Palais de Tokyo; check shows and events at www.palais-detokyo.com. Another irresistible invitation comes from Le Grand Palais this fall. "Matisse-Picasso" (September 24–January 6, 2003; 410-286-8310, www.franceguide.com) will contrast the work of the two friends and rivals in a hundred paintings and sculptures.

Barcelona celebrates the 150th anniversary of architect Antonio Gaudí's birth this year with no fewer than twenty exhibits at museums and galleries all over town (www.gaudi2002.bcn.es). Of course, the city itself remains Gaudí's finest showcase. But the exhibits focus on details such as the architect's use of ceramics. Other Barcelona news: The city is the port of departure for First European Cruises' brand-new ship, the European Stars, debuting on March 29th and sailing the Mediterranean every week, with stops at Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Messina, Valletta, and Palma (888-983-8767, www.first-european.com).

OPERA AND CLASSICAL HIGH NOTES

Philadelphia's grand new Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts was designed by Rafael Viñoly to take a rightful place amid the city's three centuries of distinguished architecture. Its inaugural season includes not only the Philadelphia Orchestra in its new home, but also performances by guests ranging from Keith Jarrett (March 1) to the Alvin Ailey Company (April 25–28) to Itzhak Perlman (April 28). For more information, call 215-893-1999, or visit www.kimmelcenter.org.

New Yorkers eagerly await the premier on February 14th of Prokofiev's "War and Peace" at the Metropolitan Opera, in an acclaimed coproduction with the Mariinsky Opera (212-362-6000, www.metopera.org). The headlining première at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis is the world début on June 9th of Cary Franklin's "Loss of Eden," an opera about the lives of Charles and Anne Lindbergh. The opera was commissioned to mark the centennial of the aviator's birth and the seventy-fifth anniversary of his "Spirit of St. Louis" flight (314-961-0644, www.opera-stl.org).

The Savonlinna Opera Festival (July 5–August 4; www.operafestival.fi) in Finland celebrates its ninetieth anniversary with two premières: Aarre Merikanto's "Juha" and Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde," as well as guest productions of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger" and Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier" by Düsseldorf's Deutsche Oper am Rhein. As always, the audience of the Savonlinna festival sits in the courtyard of the town's ancient castle, set on a lake—an experience of transcendent beauty.

The Helsinki Festival (August 23–September 8; www.helsinkifestival.fi) is known for great symphonic music, with top soloists, but will also highlight world music this year, along with dance, theatre, and cinema. During its long summer days, there are two other ways to combine a visit to Helsinki with the joys of music: Take the new express train west, about 150 miles, to the Turku Music Festival (August 9–18; www.turkumusicfestival.fi) for orchestral, vocal, and chamber music concerts presented in the castle of Finland's oldest town. Just a few miles from Turku, the Nantaali Music Festival is staged (June 7–19; www.festivals.fi) with great chamber music that brings to life the medieval town's old quarter.

For its thirtieth anniversary, the International Istanbul Music Festival (June 7–July 2) is bringing together a galaxy of music greats—Paavo Berglund and Kiri Te Kanawa with the London Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir, and the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, to name just a few. Concert halls don't get much grander than the Church of Hagia Eirene (now the Aya Irini Museum), one of the city's largest Byzantine churches and the festival's most important venue. (See www.istfest.org for this and other details on international festivals in Istanbul, including its film fest, April 13–28, and jazz fest, July 5–20.)

courtesy of the Finnish Tourist Board

SAVONLINNA'S NINETIETH

The Finnish opera fest will celebrate a birthday with the premières of "Tristan und Isolde" and "Juha" beginning in July.

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ITINERARY: cultural travel

ISLANDS OF JAZZ AND FILM

The "cross-pollination" of Latin music and jazz makes the Curaçao Heineken Jazz Festival (May 31–June 2; www.curacaojazz.com) a favorite of *JazzTimes'* publisher Lee Mergner, as does the island's renowned snorkeling and diving and the beauty of Landhuis Brakkeput, the fest's old plantation setting. "It's a treasure of a place—not overly touristy and with an interesting population mix," Mergner says, referring to the island's Dutch and Caribbean heritage, on view in its old streets and intriguing museums. In August (dates to be determined), Curaçao turns to the sounds of the Salsa Festival, where past stars have included Oscar D'Leon, Marc Anthony, and Celia Cruz (800-3CURACAO, www.curacao-tourism.com). For more island cross-pollination, see www.JazzTimes.com for information on its authorized December 2002 trip to the Havana International Jazz Festival—"the whole Buena Vista Social Club scene," as Mergner puts it.

For beaches, partying, and access to filmmakers, the place to be this spring is the fifth Bermuda International Film Festival (April 12–18; www.bermudafilmfest.com). This year, Australia is saluted among the fifty shorts, documentaries, and features to be screened. "Those in competition are independent films, but they're book-ended with high-profile Hollywood fare," says festival director Aideen Ratteray Pryse. "What people like is that even though hundreds attend the opening and wrap parties,

BERMUDA INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
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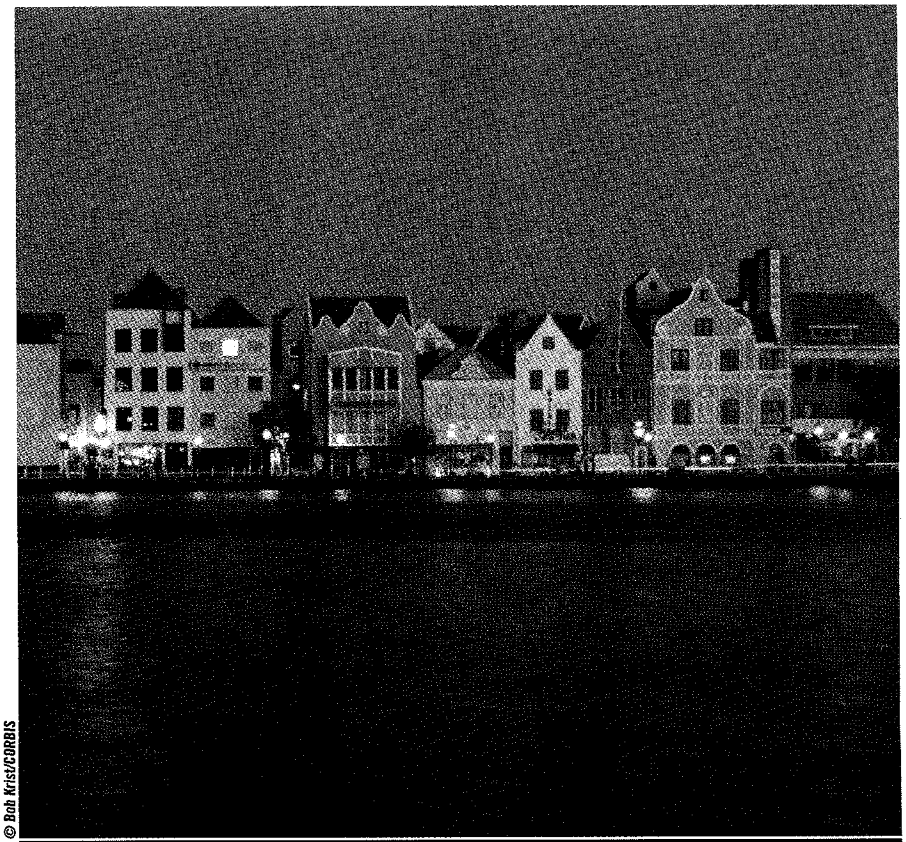

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FEST SCENES

(Top) The Bermuda Film Festival is fast-becoming known as one of the most intimate fests on the international cultural calendar. *(Below)* Curaçao as seen from Willemstad at dusk.

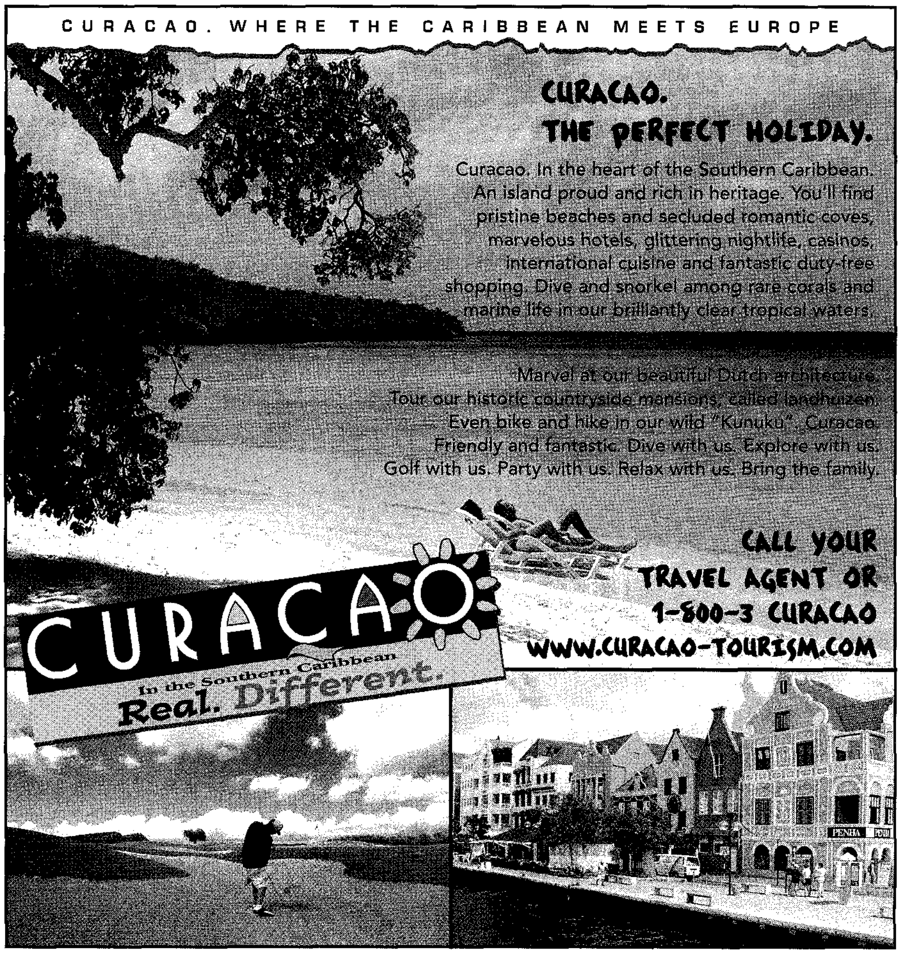
it's all very intimate and relaxed. Nothing is 'behind the ropes.'" For another kind of insider access, you can visit some of Bermuda's spectacular historic homes during the Open Houses and Garden Tours every Wednesday in May (800-BERMUDA, www.bermudatourism.com).

If your fantasies need renewal, there's no place like Hawaii. So there's every reason to combine a getaway with the twenty-second annual Hawaii International Film Festival (November 1–10; 808-528-FILM, www.hiff.org). (A smaller spring film fest occurs April 19–25.) Specializing in films from Asia, the Pacific, and North America, it will hold screenings of 120 films, including forty U.S. premières, as well as seminars with filmmakers and critics held at twenty-six sites mostly on Oahu.

For glamourous starlike seclusion, the JW Marriott Ihilani Resort and Spa (800-626-4446, www.ihilani.com) is located on the quiet, rural, western coast of Oahu. The resort, set along a stunning series of coves with unparalleled sunset views, indulges guests with every luxury—including native Hawaiian massage.

Two nights will be devoted to Hawaiian jazz—a fusion of island music and jazz cadence—at the ninth annual Hawaiian Jazz Festival (in Honolulu, July 18–19; and on Maui, July 20–21; 808-941-9974, www.hawaiijazz.com). The state's large community of artists will contribute to the fifty-two-year-old juried Artists of Hawaii exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Arts (June 27–August 4; 808-532-8700, www.honoluluacademy.org).

Island sights and sounds can be taken in aboard the new Norwegian Star, which sails from Honolulu every Sunday, stopping at Kauai, the Big Island, and Maui (it's the only weekly sailing that includes all four destinations), as well as Fanning Island in the Republic of Kiribati, nearly a thousand miles south of Hawaii. Onboard diversions are provided by the Hawaii-based Mandara Spa, as well as classes in Hawaiian crafts and lectures by visiting dignitaries on island culture (800-327-7030, www.ncl.com).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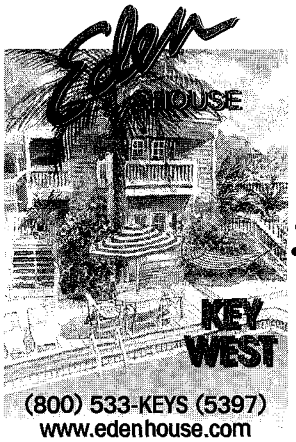
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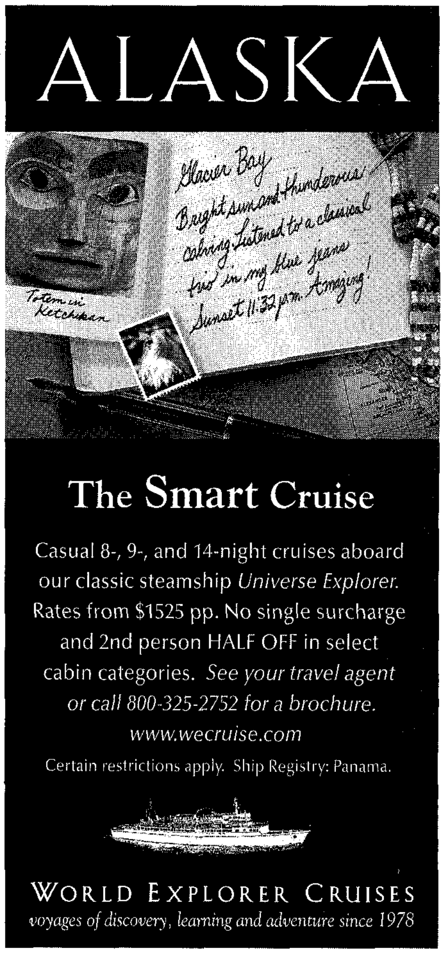
ALASKA

Glacier Bay
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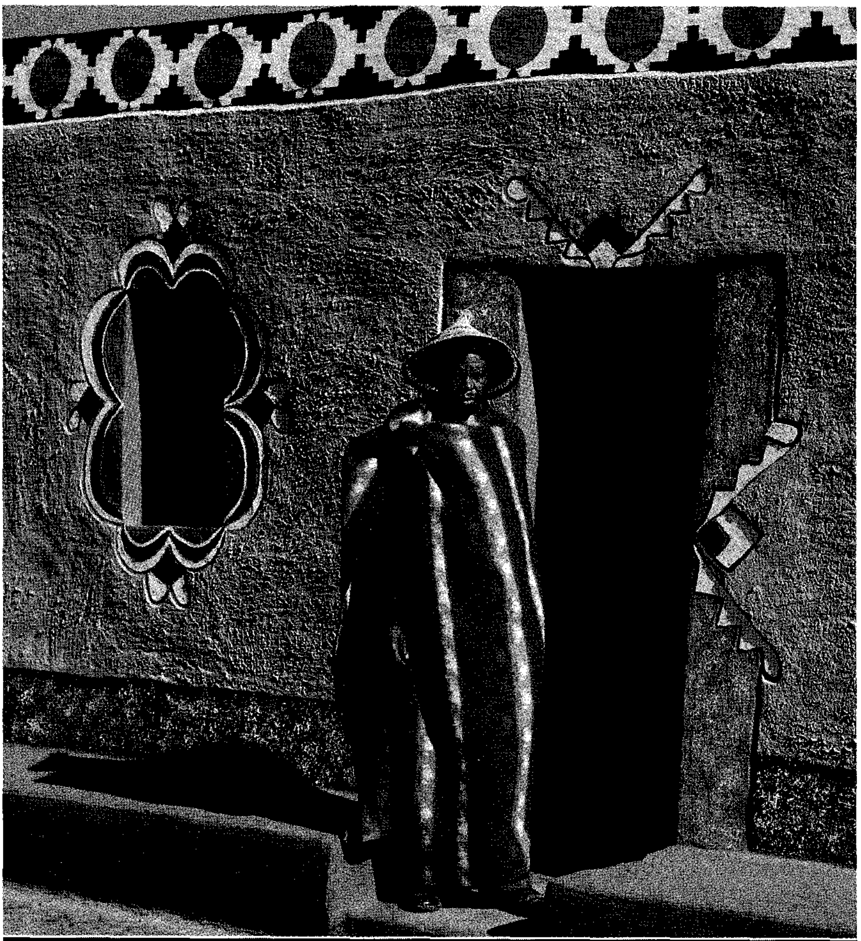
UNDER AFRICAN SKIES

As summer turns to fall in the southern hemisphere, oenophiles headed for the scenic wine routes just outside South Africa's Cape Town will find the harvest about to begin, adding bold, new wines to the hundreds of others awaiting tasting. With the wine comes song—classical music and jazz—at the five-month Spier Festival (through March 16) held in a large amphitheatre outside Stellenbosch, the country's wine capital and home to a score of wine estates. Against the magnificent backdrop of Cape Town itself, surrounded by vistas of Table Mountain and the ocean, the Cape Town Festival (March 16–24) brings performances by local and international talent to theatres, galleries, and clubs. Looking ahead: Hikers drawn to the spectacular peaks and spires of Drakensberg in September will find additional diversion in the top-ranked South African theatre presented at the Natal Witness Hilton Arts Festival in Hilton (September 20–22; 212-730-2929, www.southafrica.net).



courtesy of South African Tourism

LITEM' ART

The vibrant decoration of Basotho Village huts in the province of Free State can be admired on a drive through the rural hinterlands of South Africa.

Closer to home, the beaches of the Outer Banks of North Carolina at Cape Hatteras National Seashore are as pristine as those anywhere, and they also come with music, dance, and theatre provided by the North Carolina School of the Arts. The school is in residence from late June to mid-August in Roanoke Island Festival Park—making evenings as entertaining as mornings on the dunes (800-446-6262, www.outerbanks.org).

(New York-based Nao Hauser is a freelance writer, editor, and consultant who contributes regularly to *Bon Appétit.*)

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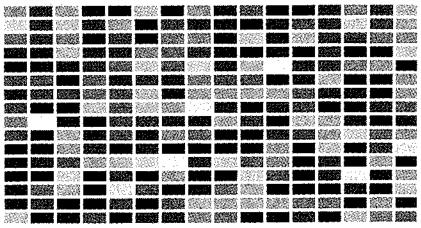
EXHIBITS COAST TO COAST

From the masterworks of Ancient Egypt to the idolatry of a Campbell's soup can, art is exuberantly alive and on display at the nation's museums and galleries. This season, there's something for everyone, and art can just as easily take the form of a toothbrush as a beautiful woman.

Boston "Impressionist Still Life" at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (February 17–June 9; 617-542-4MFA, www.mfa.org). Cézanne, of course, but also an unexpected perspective on the works of artists ranging from Courbet to Gauguin.



New York "Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting" at the Museum of Modern Art (February 14–May 21; 212-708-9400, www.moma.org) offers some 188 works in a most comprehensive overview of the German painter, who is considered one of the world's top living artists.

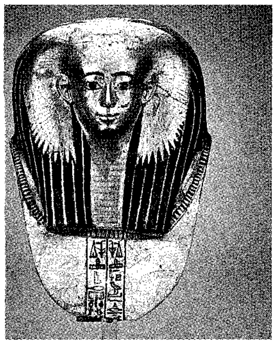
Washington, D.C. "Goya: Images of Women" at the National Gallery of Art (March 10–June 2; 202-737-4215, www.nga.gov) brings together more than a hundred works, most from the Prado Museum in Madrid, to celebrate the artist and his lifelong fascination with females.

Columbus, Ohio "Mood River" at the Wexner Center for the Arts (February 3–May 26; 614-292-3535, www.wexarts.org) demonstrates through the works of two hundred designers from twelve countries the power of design to shape our sense of the world. Items range from the toothbrush to the airplane, and artists include Philippe Starck and Frank Stella.

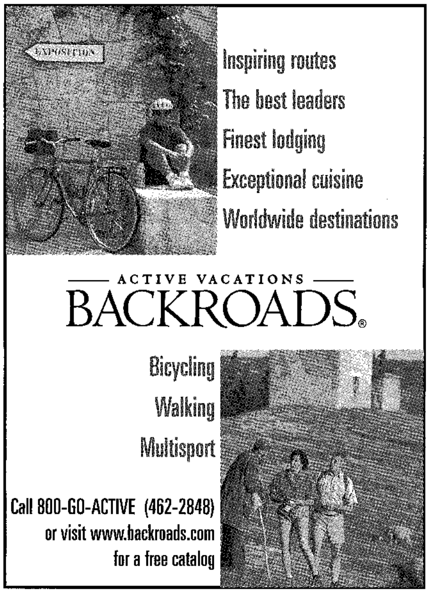
Chicago "Ansel Adams at 100," at the Art Institute of Chicago (February 21–June 2; 312-443-3600, www.artic.edu), displays 114 of the artist's finest photographs. "Mies in America," at the Museum of Contemporary Art (February 16–May 26; 312-280-2660, www.mcachicago.org), is aptly seen in the city that was home to both the architect and the world's first skyscrapers.

San Diego "The Photography of Alfred Stieglitz: Georgia O'Keeffe's Enduring Gift," at the Museum of Photographic Arts (June 9–August 25; 619-238-7559, www.mopa.org), is the first travelling exhibit of the 110 images given to the George Eastman House by O'Keeffe. "Idol of the Moderns: Pierre-Auguste Renoir and American Painting," at the San Diego Museum of Art (June 29–September 15; 619-232-7931, www.sdmart.org), has fifteen Renoirs and thirty-five works by American painters influenced by the legacy of this French Impressionist. For a brochure of these and other city cultural events, visit www.sandiegoartandsol.com.

Los Angeles "Andy Warhol Retrospective" at the Museum of Contemporary Art (May 25–August 18; 213-626-6222, www.moca.org) includes everything from the earliest soup cans to later abstract works, with a selection of Warhol's films.



San Francisco "Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum," (currently at The Brooklyn Museum through February 24th), will be up at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor (August 10–November 3; 415-863-3330, www.legionofhonor.org). It takes an art history approach to illustrating the ancient culture with 150 treasures from The British Museum.



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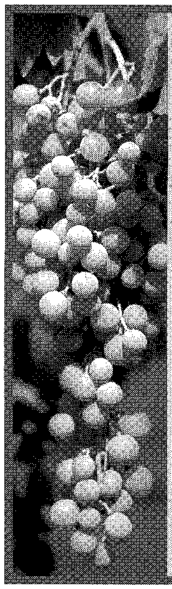
INSIDE INFORMATION

With the current delays at airports, the notion of jet lag has taken on a whole new meaning. Some insider tips from experts, though, may help to enhance your options and make your trip more pleasurable.

When Peter Greenberg, travel editor for NBC's "Today" show, is flying at a congested time—like early in the morning—he heads for the Arrivals rather than Departures level when the two are interconnected. "It's always empty, and I save fifteen minutes every time," he advises sagely. Mathew Upchurch, CEO of Virtuoso (a network of six thousand luxury-travel specialists), recommends using a good travel agent who knows how to avoid crowded flights. "That way, you have someone to turn to for help if anything unanticipated comes up. But take a deep breath before you call them and resolve to be nice," he cautions, adding that it's a wise idea to choose connections that provide sufficient time between flights. Joe Brancatelli, a veteran business-travel journalist, suggests carrying little or no luggage as a means of transiting the tougher security terminals faster, and to carry a passport as the best form of ID, even on domestic flights. He also believes that those who travel frequently are "crazy" not to belong to at least one airline travel club. "Clubs are oases of calm in the frenzy," he maintains. "And clubs can help you get your boarding pass and avoid the check-in lines." Both Brancatelli and Greenberg often send their luggage on ahead via UPS, FedEx, or DHL. "The less I have to carry, the sweeter life is," says Brancatelli. "The whole idea is not to stand in line," echoes Greenberg. "Anyone worried about the expense ought to ask themself how much their time is worth."

None of the experts, interestingly, have curtailed their travel one bit since 9-11. But few outpace Bill Hastings, a managing director at the Pacific Asia Travel Association. Within five weeks of the disaster, he had flown to Monaco, Moscow, Mexico City, Taipei, Victoria, Canada, New York, Washington, D.C., and twice to London. "I stand in line a lot," he says stoically, with a trace of a smile.

–Richard J. Pietschmann



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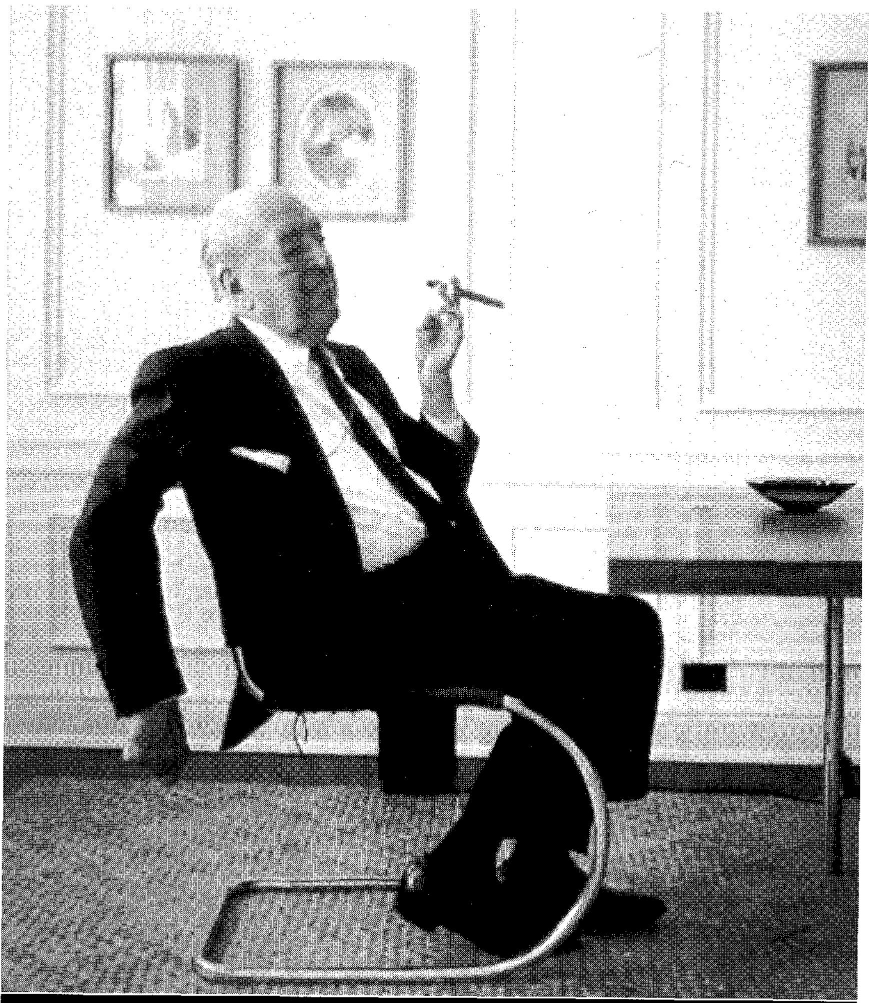
NEWS BRIEFS

Global Impact Tours combines adventure travel with support for non-profits. A trek to the Smoky Mountains (September 19–22) includes a volunteer "Day of Impact" to preserve local Appalachian culture at the Cades Cove Preservation Association project. . . . Far removed from tourist haunts, **Cross-Culture's** small-group tour to Provence (April 16–27) will trace the footsteps of the region's renowned painters. . . . Authentic Irish encounters are guaranteed on **The Celtic Traveler's** tour of "A Secret Ireland" (May 16–27). Famous fiddler and co-host Feargal Mac Amhlaoibh is well-versed in the best evening haunts for rousing traditional music. . . . **First Person Journeys** takes you off the usual circuit to an undiscovered province in northwestern China. "Exotic Xinjiang" will be a memorable itinerary for the culturally minded. . . . Anguilla's **Sonesta Beach Resort & Villas** has original Caribbean artwork on display. And if your curiosity is piqued, the nearby Savannah Gallery is currently exhibiting local painters Tanya Clark and Melsadis Flemming. . . . Jamaican folklore and calypso performances are on display weekly at **Elegant Resorts International** properties. Montego Bay's



Gelatin silver print © Werner Blaser

"MIES IN AMERICA"

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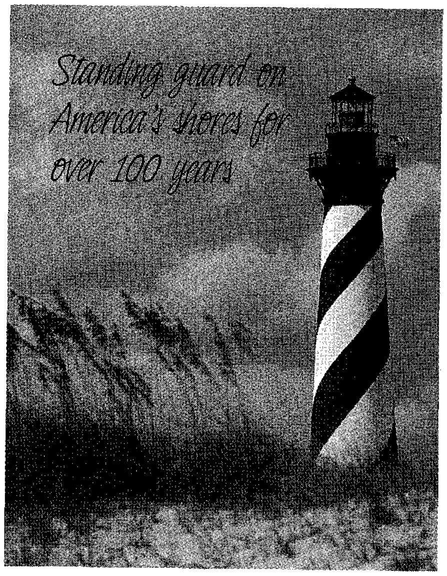

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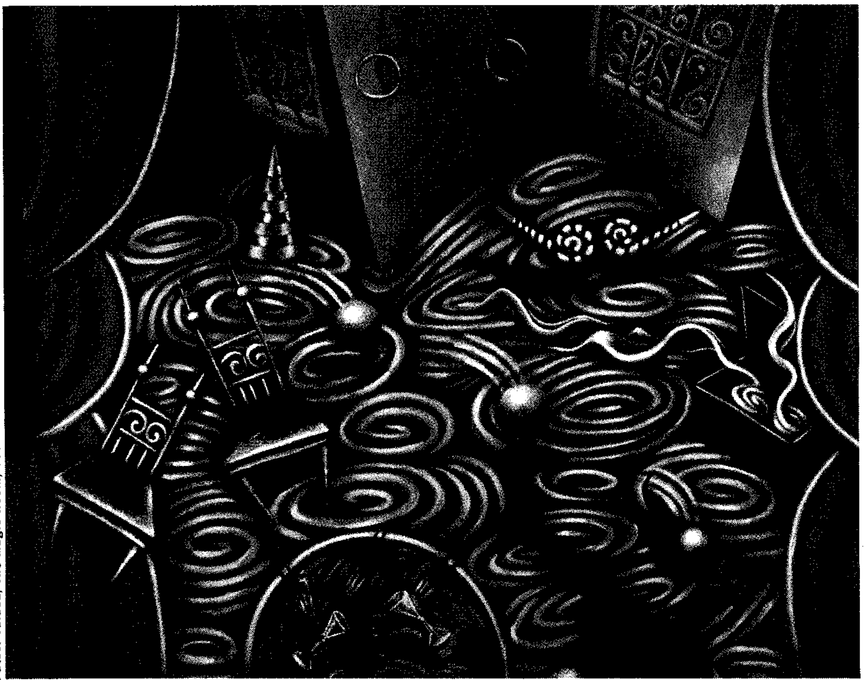
ITINERARY: cultural travel

Jamaica Carnival (March 31–April 7) provides an opportunity for full immersion in *soca* parties and street parades. . . . To cross paths with Polynesian culture, you can island-hop the Marquesas on **TravLTips'** supply ship, the Aranul. . . . **Senior Women's Travel** will encourage full indulgence in the culture of Greece, from archeology to noshing (June 3–13; September 23–October 3). . . . Seven stars in seven shining shows will be featured on **Theatre Guild's** 2002 cruise (May 13–31) on the Caronia, a Cunard luxury liner. A fresh course will be charted to western Mediterranean ports of call, where a party in Gibraltar will include the governor himself. . . . Log on to **www.Actividayz.com** to sign up for in a day trip that introduces you to the "real Italy." Spend a morning or afternoon with Italian locals as you hunt for truffles, sample wine, or test a new recipe. . . . A countryside villa arranged by **Italian Rentals** offers the perfect retreat after a busy day of absorbing the wonders of Florence. . . . Need to brush up on your foreign language skills? Subscribe to an audio magazine from **Champs-Elysées**. Each issue contains an hour-long news program similar to NPR's *All Things Considered.* An accompanying booklet provides a transcript and glossary of difficult words and phrases. . . . Explore Inuit art and culture on Arctic Odysseys' "High Arctic" trip (July 31–August 10). . . . **I. C. C. E.** (International Council for Cultural Exchange) has designed a northern European opera tour (June 9–22) to Scandinavia and Estonia that will include a visit to St. Petersburg's White Nights Festival. . . . Four well-known Alaskan mystery writers—Sue Henry, Father Brad Reynolds, Dana Stabenow, and John Straley—will spearhead a "Mystery Writers Cruise" to Alaska (May 14–28), the first of **World Explorer Cruises'** theme-excursions. . . . For aficionados of la dolce vita in Renaissance Italy, **Palladio Tours** visits luxurious Palladian villas in historic towns like Bassano del Grappa and Asolo in the Venice region. . . . **Far & Wide's** fly-and-drive itinerary to Provence offers a seven-day car rental for exploring the southern French countryside—from herb-scented hills to white-cliffed coastlines—and its Italian cooking classes in the Umbrian town of Orvieto require settling in for a week with Chef Lorenzo Polegri to learn his culinary magic (from unlocking the secrets of truffles to preparing *dolci di crema*). . . . You don't have to leave the continent to revel in **New Mexico's** full slate of springtime cultural events, including the celebrated Taos Talking Picture film festival (April 11–14) and the 19th Annual Gathering of Nations



Patssi Valdez, The Magic Room, 1994/Smithsonian American Art Museum

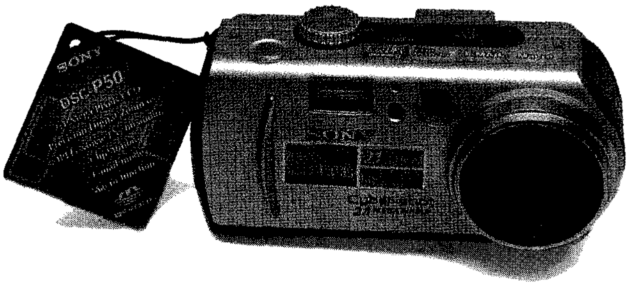
ARTE LATINO IN SANTA FE

With works dating from 1795 to the present, the Museum of New Mexico is preparing to show rarely lent paintings, sculptures, and photos this summer.

Pow Wow in Albuquerque (April 25–27). More in Taos: **The Parks Gallery** exhibits distinguished local artists and pays homage to artist-bibliophile Melissa Zink's bronze characters and mixed-media pieces. . . . Receive the healing touch and luxuriate European style in America's only sea water thalasso therapy spa at **Gurney's Inn Resort & Spa** in Montauk, Long Island. . . . Check in to **The Waldorf Towers** for luxe accommodations, then check out the cultural wealth in tantalizingly close proximity: The Whitney Museum's signature Biennial Exhibit beginning next month, as well as Broadway's "Elaine Stritch at Liberty" (Neil Simon Theatre); this spring's only new musical comedy "Thoroughly Modern Millie" (Marquis Theatre); and anticipated newcomer "The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?" by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Edward Albee (Golden Theatre). Uptown, Jazz at Lincoln Center celebrates the career of Abbey Lincoln featuring the legendary vocalist and special guests at Alice Tully Hall (March 7–9).

–Dan Ouellette

PICTURE THIS.



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1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

2. Every contestant must be 18 years of age or older and a legal U.S. resident as of the date of entry.

3. Contestants may submit one (1) entry per household. All entries must be received by April 29, 2002. All submitted entries become the property of The Condé Nast Publications, Inc. and will not be acknowledged or returned.

4. Contestants may enter the sweepstakes by completing and submitting the business reply card in the "Itinerary: Cultural Travel" section of the February 18, 2002 issue of *The New Yorker.* Entries that are lost, late, damaged, misdirected, garbled, or incompletely received, for any reason, will not be eligible. Mechanically reproduced entries are not eligible.

5. One grand-prize winner will be selected at random from all eligible entries on or about April 29, 2002. All decisions of the judges are final. Grand Prize is a Sony DSC-P50 Cyber-Shot Digital Camera. Total approximate retail value of grand prize package is $400. Income and other taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winners. Winner will receive a written notification on or about May 6, 2002.

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9. Acceptance of prize constitutes consent to use winner's name and likeness for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes without further compensation, except where prohibited. The winner may be required to sign an Affidavit of Eligibility and may be required to sign a Liability/Publicity release within ten days of date of notification or an alternate winner may be chosen.

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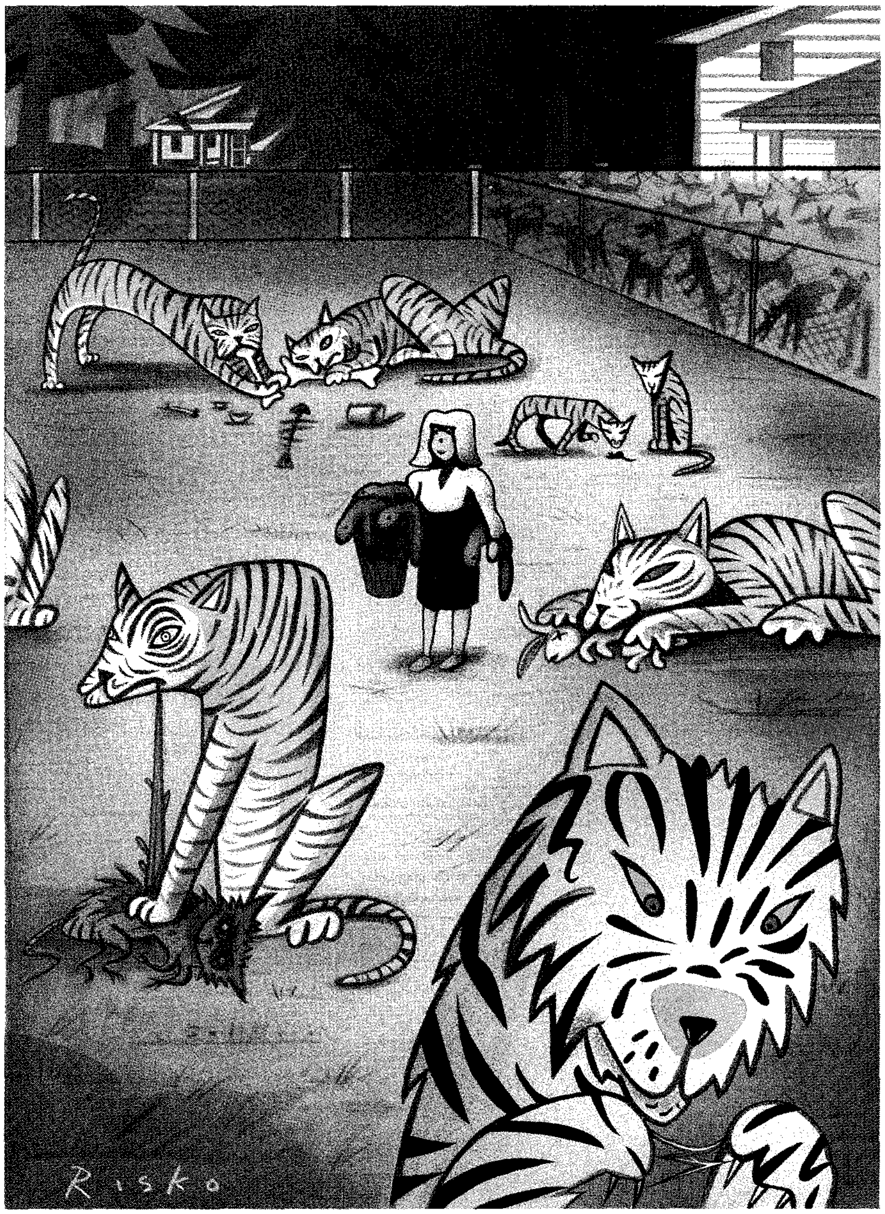
POPULAR CHRONICLES

THE LADY AND THE TIGERS

Is New Jersey any place to keep a pack of wild cats?

BY SUSAN ORLEAN



"Those are Joan's own private kitty cats," one of Byron-Marasek's neighbors said.

ROBERT RISKO

On January 27, 1999, a tiger went walking through the township of Jackson, New Jersey. According to the Tiger Information Center, a tiger's natural requirements are "some form of dense vegetative cover, sufficient large ungulate prey, and access to water." By those measures, Jackson is really not a bad place to be a tiger. The town is halfway between Manhattan and Philadelphia, in a corner of Ocean County—an easy commute to Trenton and Newark, but still a green respite from the silvery sweep of electric towers and petroleum tanks to the north, and the bricked-in cities and mills farther south. Only forty-three thousand people live in Jackson, but it is a huge town, a bit more than a hundred square miles, all of it as flat as a tabletop and splattered with ponds and little lakes. A lot of Jackson is built up with subdivisions and Wawa food markets, or soon will be, but the rest is still primordial New Jersey pinelands of broom sedge and pitch pine and sheep laurel and peewee white oaks, as dense a vegetative cover as you could find anywhere. The local ungulates may not be up to what a tiger would find in more typical habitats, like Siberia or Madhya Pradesh—there are just the usual ornery and overfed pet ponies, panhandling herds of white-tailed deer, and a milk cow or two—unless you include Jackson's Six Flags Wild Safari, which is stocked with zebras and giraffes and antelopes and gazelles and the beloved but inedible animal characters from Looney Tunes.

Nevertheless, the Jackson tiger wasn't long for this world. A local woman preparing lunch saw him out her kitchen window, announced the sighting to her husband, and then called the police. The tiger slipped into the woods. At around five that afternoon, a workman at the Dawson Corporation complained about a tiger in the company parking lot. By seven, the tiger had circled the nearby houses. When he later returned to the Dawson property, he was being followed by the Jackson police, wildlife officials, and an airplane with an infrared scope. He picked his way through a few more back yards and the scrubby fields near Interstate 195, and then, unfazed by tranquillizer darts fired at him by a veterinarian, headed in the general direction of a middle school; one witness described seeing an "orange blur." At around nine that night, the tiger was shot dead by a wildlife official, after the authorities had given up on capturing him alive. A pathologist determined that he was a young Bengal tiger, nine feet long and more than four hundred pounds. Nothing on the tiger indicated where he had come from, however, and there were no callers to the Jackson police reporting a tiger who had left home. Everyone in town knew that there were tigers in Jackson—that is, everyone knew about the fifteen tigers at Six Flags Wild Safari. But not everyone knew that there were other tigers in Jackson, as many as two dozen of them, belonging to a woman named Joan Byron-

Marasek. In fact, Jackson has one of the highest concentrations of tigers per square mile anywhere in the world.

Byron-Marasek is famously and purposely mysterious. She rarely leaves the compound where she lives with her tigers, her husband, Jan Marasek, and scores of dogs, except to go to court. On videotapes made of her by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, she looks petite and unnaturally blond, with a snub nose and a small mouth and a startled expression. She is either an oldish-looking young person or a youngish-looking old person; evidently, she has no Social Security number, which makes her actual age difficult to establish. She has testified that she was born in 1955 and was enrolled in New York University in 1968; when it was once pointed out that this would have made her a thirteen-year-old college freshman, she allowed as how she wasn't very good with dates. She worked for a while as an actress and was rumored to have appeared on Broadway in Tom Stoppard's play "Jumpers," swinging naked from a chandelier. A brochure for her tiger preserve shows her wearing silver boots and holding a long whip and feeding one of her tigers, Jaipur, from a baby bottle. On an application for a wildlife permit, Byron-Marasek stated that she had been an assistant tiger trainer and a trapeze artist with Ringling Brothers and L. N. Fleckles; had trained with Doc Henderson, the illustrious circus veterinarian; and had read, among other books, "The Manchurian Tiger," "The World of the Tiger," "Wild Beasts and Their Ways," "My Wild Life," "They Never Talk Back," and "Thank You, I Prefer Lions."

The Maraseks moved to Jackson in 1976, with Bombay, Chinta, Iman, Jaipur, and Maya, five tigers they had got from an animal trainer named David McMillan. They bought land in a featureless and barely populated part of town near Holmeson's Corner, where Monmouth Road and Millstone Road intersect. It was a good place to raise tigers. There was not much nearby except for a church and a few houses. One neighbor was a Russian Orthodox priest who ran a Christmas-tree farm next to his house; another lived in a gloomy bungalow with a rotting cabin cruiser on cement blocks in the front yard.

For a long time, there were no restrictions in New Jersey on owning wildlife. But beginning in 1971, after regular reports of monkey bites and tiger maulings, exotic-animal owners had to register with the state. Dangerous exotic animals were permitted only if it could be shown that they were needed for education or performance or research. Byron-Marasek held both the necessary New Jersey permit and an exhibitor's license from the United States Department of Agriculture, which supervises animal welfare nationally.

After arriving in Jackson, Byron-Marasek got six more tigers—Bengal, Hassan, Madras, Marco, Royal, and Kizmet—from McMillan and from Ringling Brothers. The next batch—Kirin, Kopan, Bali, Brunei, Brahma, and Burma—were born in the back yard after Byron-Marasek allowed her male and female tigers to commingle. More cubs were born, and more tigers were obtained, and the tiger population of Holmeson's Corner steadily increased. Byron-Marasek called her operation the Tigers Only Preservation Society. Its stated mission was, among other things, to conserve all tiger species, to return captive tigers to the wild, and "to resolve the human/tiger conflict and create a resolution."

"I eat, sleep, and breathe tigers," Byron-Marasek told a local reporter. "I never take vacations. This is my love, my passion." A friend of hers told another reporter, "She walks among her tigers just like Tarzan. She told me, 'I have scratches all along the sides of my rib cage and both my arms have been cut open, but they're just playing.' Now, that's love."

You know how it is—you start with one tiger, then you get another and another, then a few are born and a few die, and you start to lose track of details like exactly how many tigers you actually have. As soon as reports of the loose tiger came in, the police asked everyone in Jackson who had tigers to make sure that all of them were accounted for. Six Flags Wild Safari had a permit for fifteen and could account for all fifteen. At the Maraseks', the counting was done by a group of police and state wildlife officers, who spent more than nine hours peering around tumbledown fences, crates, and sheds in the back yard. Byron-Marasek's permit was for twenty-three tigers, but the wildlife officers could find only seventeen.

Over the years, some of her tigers had died. A few had succumbed to old age. Muji had an allergic reaction to an injection. Diamond had to be euthanized after Marco tore off one of his legs. Marco also killed Hassan in a fight in 1997, on Christmas Eve. Two other tigers died after eating road-killed deer that Byron-Marasek now thinks might have been contaminated with antifreeze. But that still left a handful of tigers unaccounted for.

The officers filmed the visit:

"Joan, I have to entertain the notion that there are five cats loose in town, not just one," an officer says on the videotape.

Byron-Marasek's lawyer, Valter Must, explains to the group that there was some sloppy math when she filed for the most recent permit.

The officers shift impatiently and make a few notes.

"For instance, I don't always count my kids, but I know when they're all home," Must says.

"You don't have twenty-three of them," one of the officer says.

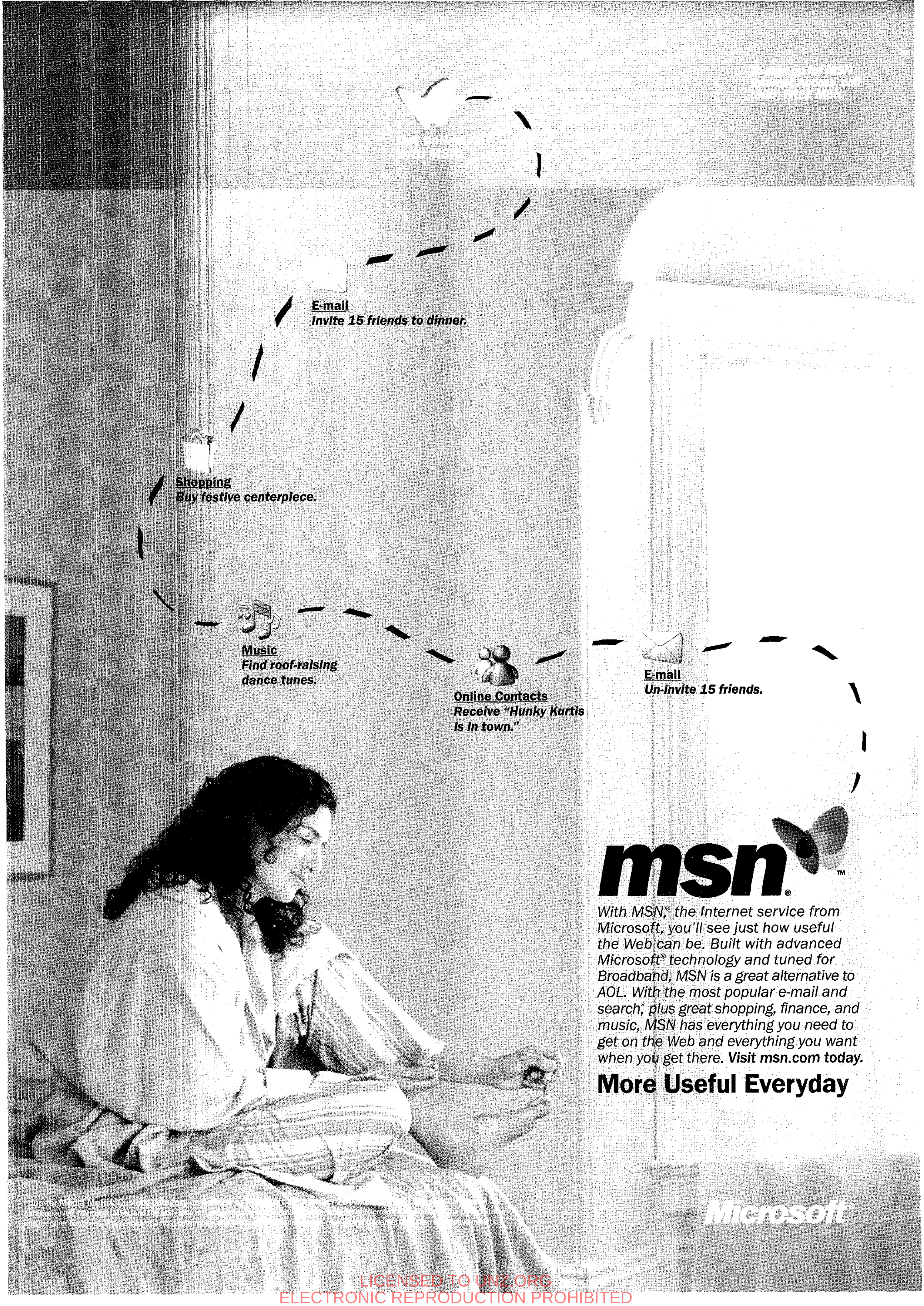
"Exactly," Must says.

"You'd probably know if there were six missing," the officer adds.

"I would agree," Must says.

On the tape, Byron-Marasek insists that no matter how suspicious the discrepancy between her permit and the tiger count appears, the loose tiger was not hers. No, she does not know whom it might have belonged to, either. And, gentlemen, don't stick your fingers into anything, please: I'm not going to tell you again.

The officers ask to see Byron-Marasek's paperwork. She tells them that she is embarrassed to take them into her house because it is a mess. The tiger quarters look cheerless and bare, with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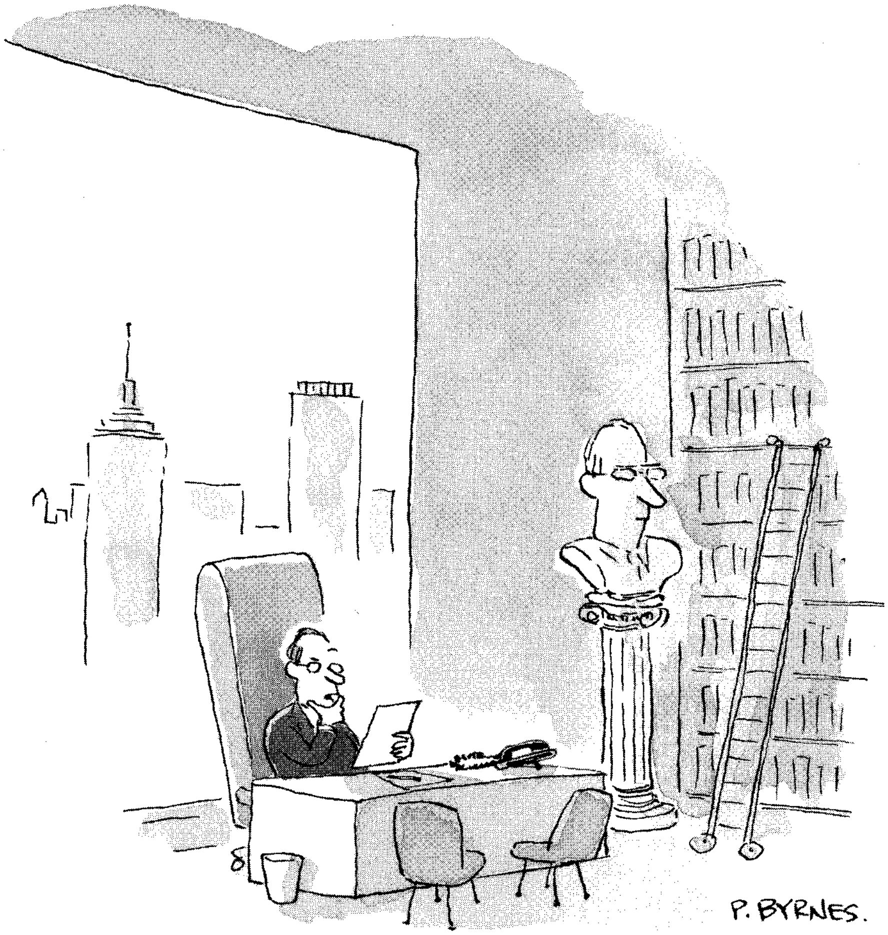
dirt floors and chain-link fences and blue plastic tarps flapping in the January wind, as forlorn as a bankrupt construction site. During the inspection, a ruckus starts up in one of the tiger pens. Byron-Marasek, who represents herself as one of the world's foremost tiger authorities, runs to see what it is, and reappears, wild-eyed and frantic, yelling, "Help me! Help! They're going to . . . they're going to kill each other!" The officers head toward the tiger fight, but then Byron-Marasek waves to stop them and screams, "No, just Larry! Just Larry!"—meaning Larry Herrighty, the head of the permit division, about whom she will later say, in an interview, "The tigers hate him."

The day of the tiger count was the first time that the state had inspected the Maraseks' property in years. New Jersey pays some attention to animal welfare—for instance, it closed the Scotch Plains Zoo in 1997 because of substandard conditions—but it doesn't have the resources to monitor all its permit holders. There had been a few complaints about the tigers: in 1983, someone reported that the Maraseks played recordings of jungle drums over a public-address system between 4 and 6 A.M., inciting their tigers to roar. The State Office of Noise Control responded by measuring the noise level outside the compound one night, and Byron-Marasek was warned that there would be monitoring in the future, although it doesn't appear that anyone ever came back. Other complaints, about strange odors, were never investigated. Her permit was renewed annually, even as the number of animals increased.

Anyone with the type of permit Byron-Marasek had must file information about the animals' work schedule, but the state discovered that it had no records indicating that her tigers had ever performed, or that anyone had attended an educational program at Tigers Only. The one tiger with a public profile was Jaipur, who weighed more than a thousand pounds, and who, according to his owner, was listed in the *Guinness World Records* as the largest Siberian tiger in captivity. Later, in court, Byron-Marasek also described Marco as "a great exhibit cat"—this was by way of explaining why she doted on him, even though he had killed Diamond and Hassan—but, as far as anyone could tell, Marco had never been exhibited.

Now the state was paying attention to the Tigers Only Preservation Society, and it wasn't happy with what it found. In court papers, D.E.P. investigators noted, "The applicant's tiger facility was a ramshackle arrangement with yards (compounds), chutes, runs, and shift cages . . . some of which were covered by deteriorating plywood, stockade fencing and tarps, etc. . . . The periphery fence (along the border of the property), intended to keep out troublemakers, was down in several places. There was standing water and mud in the compound. There was mud on the applicant's tigers." There were deer carcasses scattered around the property, rat burrows, and a lot of large, angry dogs in separate pens near the tigers. Suddenly, one wandering tiger seemed relatively inconsequential; the inspectors were much more concerned about the fact that Byron-Marasek had at least seventeen tigers living in what they considered sorry conditions, and that the animals were being kept not for theatrical or educational purposes but as illegal pets. Byron-Marasek, for her part, was furious about the state's inspections. "The humiliation we were forced to suffer is beyond description," she said later, reading from a prepared statement at a press conference outside her compound. "Not only did they seriously endanger the lives of our tigers—they also intentionally attempted to cut off their food supply."

The one suspicion that the state couldn't confirm was that the loose tiger had belonged to Joan Byron-Marasek. DNA tests and an autopsy were inconclusive. Maybe he had been a drug dealer's guard animal, or a pet that had got out of hand and was dropped off in Jackson in the hope that the Tiger Lady would take him in. And then there were the conspiracy theorists in town who believed that the tiger had belonged to Six Flags, and that his escape was covered up because the park is the biggest employer and the primary attraction in town. In the end, however, the tiger was simply relegated to the annals of suburban odd-



"Hmm, what would Satan do?"

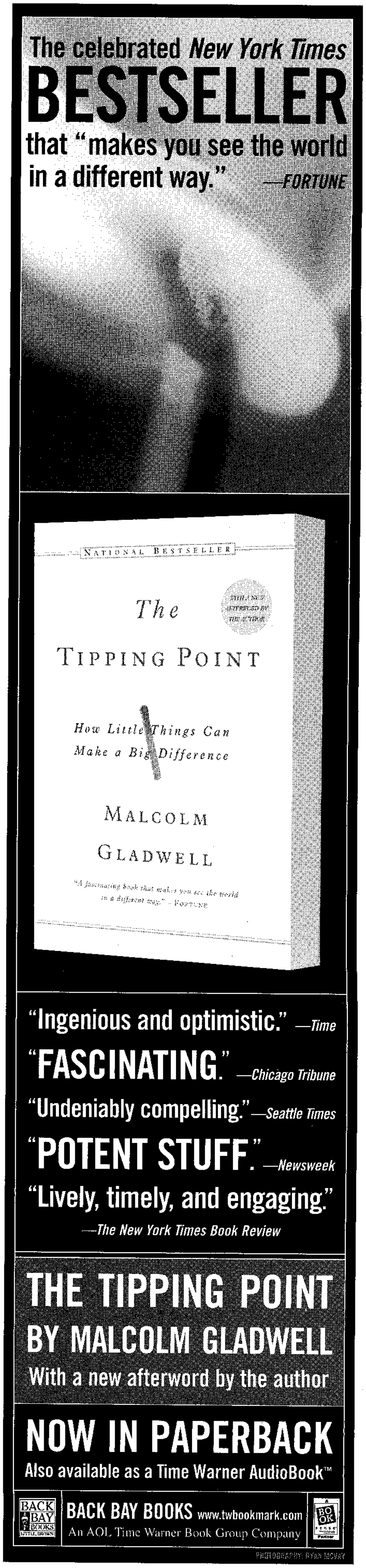
ities—a lost soul, doomed to an unhappy end, whose provenance will never be known.

It is not hard to buy a tiger. Only eight states prohibit the ownership of wild animals; three states have no restrictions whatsoever; and the rest have regulations that range from trivial to modest and are barely enforced. Exotic-animal auction houses and animal markets thrive in the Midwest and the Southeast, where wildlife laws are the most relaxed. In the last few years, dealers have also begun using the Internet. One recent afternoon, I browsed the Hunts Exotics Web site, where I could have placed an order for baby spider monkeys ($6,500 each, including delivery); an adult female two-toed sloth ($2,200); a Northern cougar female with blue eyes, who was advertised as "tame on bottle"; a black-capped capuchin monkey, needing dental work ($1,500); an agouti paca; a porcupine; or two baby tigers "with white genes" ($1,800 each). From there I was linked to more tiger sites—Mainely Felids and Wildcat Hideaway and NOAH Feline Conservation Center—and to pages for prospective owners titled "I Want a Cougar!" and "Are You Sure You Want a Monkey?" It is so easy to get a tiger, in fact, that wildlife experts estimate that there are at least fifteen thousand pet tigers in the country—more than seven times the number of registered Irish setters or Dalmatians.

One reason that tigers are readily available is that they breed easily in captivity. There are only about six thousand wild tigers left in the world, and three subspecies have become extinct just in the last sixty years. In zoos, though, tigers have babies all the time. The result is thousands of "surplus tigers"—in the zoo economy, these are animals no longer worth keeping, because there are too many of them, or because they're old and zoo visitors prefer baby animals to mature ones. In fact, many zoos began breeding excessively during the seventies and eighties when they realized that baby animals drew big crowds. The trade in exotic pets expanded as animals were sold to dealers and game ranches and unaccredited zoos once they were no longer cute. In 1999, the San Jose *Mercury News* reported that many of the best zoos in the country, including the San Diego Zoo and the Denver Zoological Gardens, regularly disposed of their surplus animals through dealers. Some zoo directors were so disturbed by the practice that they euthanized their surplus animals: according to the *Mercury News*, the director of the Detroit Zoo put two healthy Siberian tigers to sleep, rather than risk their ending up as mistreated pets or on hunting ranches. Sometimes dealers buy surplus animals just for butchering. An adult tiger, alive, costs between two hundred and three hundred dollars. A tiger pelt sells for two thousand dollars, and body parts from a large animal, which are commonly used in aphrodisiacs, can bring five times as much.

Between 1990 and 2000, Jackson's population increased by almost a third, and cranberry farms and chicken farms began yielding to condominiums and center-hall Colonials. It was probably inevitable that something would come to limn the town's changing character, its passage from a rural place to something different—a bedroom community attached to nowhere in particular, with clots of crowdedness amid a sort of essential emptiness; a place practically exploding with new people and new roads that didn't connect to anything, and fresh, clean sidewalks of cement that still looked damp; the kind of place made possible by highways and telecommuting, and made necessary by the high cost of living in bigger cities, and made desirable, ironically, by the area's quickly vanishing rural character. A tiger in town had, in a roundabout way, made all of this clear.

In 1997, a model house was built on the land immediately east of the Marakes' compound, and in the next two years thirty more houses went up. The land had been dense, brambly woods. It was wiped clean before the building started, so the new landscaping trees were barely toothpicks, held in place with rubber collars and guy wires, and the houses looked as if they'd just been unwrapped and set out, like lawn ornaments. The development was named The Preserve. The houses were airy and tall and had showy entrances and double-car garages and fancy amenities like Jacuzzis and wet bars and recessed lighting and cost around three hundred thousand dollars. They were the kind of houses that beto-



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kened a certain amount of achievement—promotion to company vice-president, say—and they were owned by people who were disconcerted to note that on certain mornings, as they stood outside playing catch with their kids or pampering their lawns, there were dozens of buzzards lined up on their roofs, staring hungrily at the Maraseks' back yard.

"If someone had told me there were tigers here, I would have never bought the house," one neighbor said not long ago. His name is Kevin Wingler, and where his lawn ends, the Maraseks' property begins. He is a car collector, and he was in his garage at the time, tinkering with a classic red Corvette he had just bought. "I love animals," he said. "We get season passes every year for the Six Flags safari, and whenever I'm out I always pet all the cows and all the pigs, and I think tigers are majestic and beautiful and everything. But we broke our ass to build this house, and it's just not right. I could have bought in any development! I even had a contract elsewhere, but the builder coaxed me into buying this." He licked his finger and dabbed at a spot on the dashboard and laughed. "This is just so weird," he said. "You'd think this would be happening in Arkansas, or something."

I drove through The Preserve and then out to a road on the other side of the Maraseks' land. This was an old road, one of the few that had been there when the Maraseks moved in, and the houses were forty or fifty years old and weathered. The one near the corner belonged to the owner of a small trucking company. He said that he had helped Joan Byron-Marasek clean up her facilities after the state inspection. "I knew she was here when I moved here fifteen years ago," he said. "Tigers nearby? I don't care. You hear a roar here and there. It's not a big concern of mine to hear a roar now and then. The stench in the summer was unbearable, though." He said he didn't think that the wandering tiger was one of Byron-Marasek's, because her tigers were so dirty and the tiger that was shot looked clean and fit. He said that, a few years before, Byron-Marasek had come by his house with a petition to stop the housing development. He didn't sign it. "The new neighbors, they're not very neighborly," he said. "They're over there in their fancy houses. She's been here a lot longer than they have." Still, he didn't want to get involved. "Those are Joan's own private kitty cats," he said, lighting a cigarette. "That's her business. I've got my life to worry about."

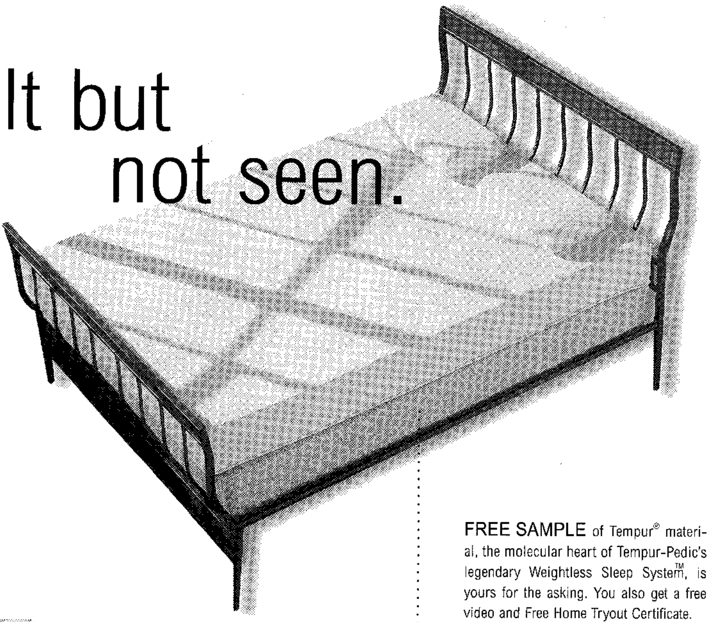
The tiger that had walked through Jackson for less than eight hours had been an inscrutable and unaccountable visitor, and, like many such visitors, he disturbed things. A meeting was held at City Hall soon after he was shot. More than a hundred people showed up. A number of them came dressed in tiger costumes. They demanded to know why the roving tiger had been killed rather than captured, and what the fate of Byron-Marasek's tigers would be. Somehow the meeting devolved into a shouting match between people from the new Jackson, who insisted that Byron-Marasek's tigers be removed immediately, and the Old Guard, who suggested that anyone who knew the town—by implication, the only people who really deserved to be living there—knew that there were tigers in Holmeson's Corner. If the tigers bothered the residents in The Preserve so much, why had they been stupid enough to move in? Soon after the meeting, the state refused to renew Byron-Marasek's wildlife permit, citing inadequate animal husbandry, failure to show theatrical or educational grounds for possessing potentially dangerous wildlife, and grievously flawed record-keeping. The township invoked its domestic-animals ordinances, demanding that Byron-Marasek get rid of some of her thirty-odd dogs or else apply for a formal kennel license. The homeowners in The Preserve banded together and sued the developer for consumer fraud, claiming that he had withheld information about the tigers in his off-site disclosure statement, which notifies prospective buyers of things like toxic-waste dumps and prisons which might affect the resale value of a house. The neighborhood group also sued Byron-Marasek for creating a nuisance with both her tigers and her dogs.

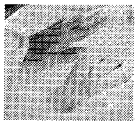
Here was where the circus began—not the circus where Joan Byron-Marasek had worked and where she had developed the recipe for "Joan's Circus Secret," which is what she feeds her tigers, but the legal circus, the amazing three-ring spectacle that has been going on now for several years. Once the state denied Byron-Marasek's request to renew her permit, she could no longer legally keep her tigers. She requested an administrative review, but the permit denial was upheld. She appealed to a higher court. She was ordered to get rid of the animals while awaiting the results of her appeal of the permit case. She appealed that order. "Tigers are extremely fragile animals," she said at a press conference. "Tigers will die if removed by someone else. If they are allowed to take our tigers, this will be a tiger holocaust." Byron-Marasek won that argument, which allowed her to keep the tigers during her permit appeal, as long as she agreed to certain conditions, including preventing the tigers from breeding. During the next couple of years, two of her tigers had cubs, which she hid from state inspectors for several weeks. She declared that the state was trying to destroy her life's work. Through her Tigers Only Web site, she supplied form letters for her supporters to send to state officials and to the D.E.P.:

> DEAR SENATOR:
>
> I am a supporter of the Tigers Only Preservation Society and Ms. Joan Byron-Marasek in her fight to keep her beautiful tigers in their safe haven in Jackson, New Jersey. . . . We should all be delighted with the fact that these tigers live together in peaceful harmony with their environment and one another right here in New Jersey. If anything, the T.O.P.S. tigers should be revered as a State treasure, and as such, we citizens of New Jersey should all proudly and enthusiastically participate in this State-wide endeavor to keep the T.O.P.S. tigers in New Jersey.
>
> If we are successful . . . future generations of constituents will be eternally grateful for your efforts in keeping these magnificent creatures living happily in our midst for all to enjoy.

In the meantime, legal proceedings dragged on while she changed attorneys five times. Her case moved up the legal chain until it reached the state's appellate court. There, in December, 2001, the original verdict was finally and conclusively upheld—in other words, Byron-Marasek was denied, once and for all, the right to keep tigers in New Jersey.

The Byron-Marasek case reminded some people of the 1995 landmark lawsuit in Oregon against Vickie Kittles, who had a hundred and fifteen dogs living with her in a school bus. Wherever Kittles stopped with her wretched me-





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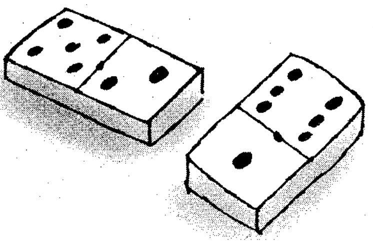
nagerie, she was given a tank of gas and directions to get out of town. She ended up in Oregon, where she was finally arrested. There she faced a district attorney named Joshua Marquis, who had made his name prosecuting the killer of Victor the Lobster, the twenty-five-pound mascot of Oregon's Seaside Aquarium who had been abducted from his tank. When the thief was apprehended, he threw Victor to the ground, breaking his shell; no lobster veterinarian could be found and Victor died three days later. Marquis was able to persuade a jury that the man was guilty of theft and criminal mischief. He decided to prosecute Kittles on grounds of animal neglect. Kittles contended that she had the right to live with her dogs in any way she chose. Marquis argued that the dogs, which got no exercise and no veterinary care and were evidently miserable, did not choose to live in a school bus. Vickie Kittles was convicted, and her dogs were sent to foster homes around the country.

The Kittles case was the first prominent suit against an "animal hoarder"—a person who engages in the pathological collecting of animals. Tiger Ladies are somewhat rare, but there are Cat Ladies and Bird Men all over the country, and often they end up in headlines like "201 CATS PULLED FROM HOME" and "PETS SAVED FROM HORROR HOME" and "CAT LOVER'S NEIGHBORS TIRED OF FELINE FIASCO." A study published by the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium says that more than two-thirds of hoarders are females, and most often they hoard cats, although dogs, birds, farm animals, and, in one case, beavers, are hoarded as well. The median number of animals is thirty-nine, but many hoarders have more than a hundred. Hoarders, according to the consortium, "may have problems concentrating and staying on track with any management plan."

On the other hand, animal hoarders may have boundless energy and focus when it comes to fighting in court. Even after Byron-Marasek lost her final appeal, she devised another way to frustrate the state's efforts to remove her tigers. The Department of Environmental Protection had found homes for the tigers at the Wild Animal Orphanage in San Antonio, Texas, and come up with a plan for moving the tigers there on the orphanage's Humane Train. In early January, the superior-court judge Eugene Serpentelli held a hearing on the matter. The Tiger Lady came to court wearing a dark-green pants suit and square-toed shoes and carrying a heavy black briefcase. She was edgy and preoccupied and waved off anyone who approached her except for a local radio host who had trumpeted her cause on his show and a slim young man who huddled with her during breaks. The young man was as circumspect as she was, politely declining to say whether he was a contributor to the Tigers Only Preservation Society or a fellow tiger owner or perhaps someone with his own beef with the D.E.P.

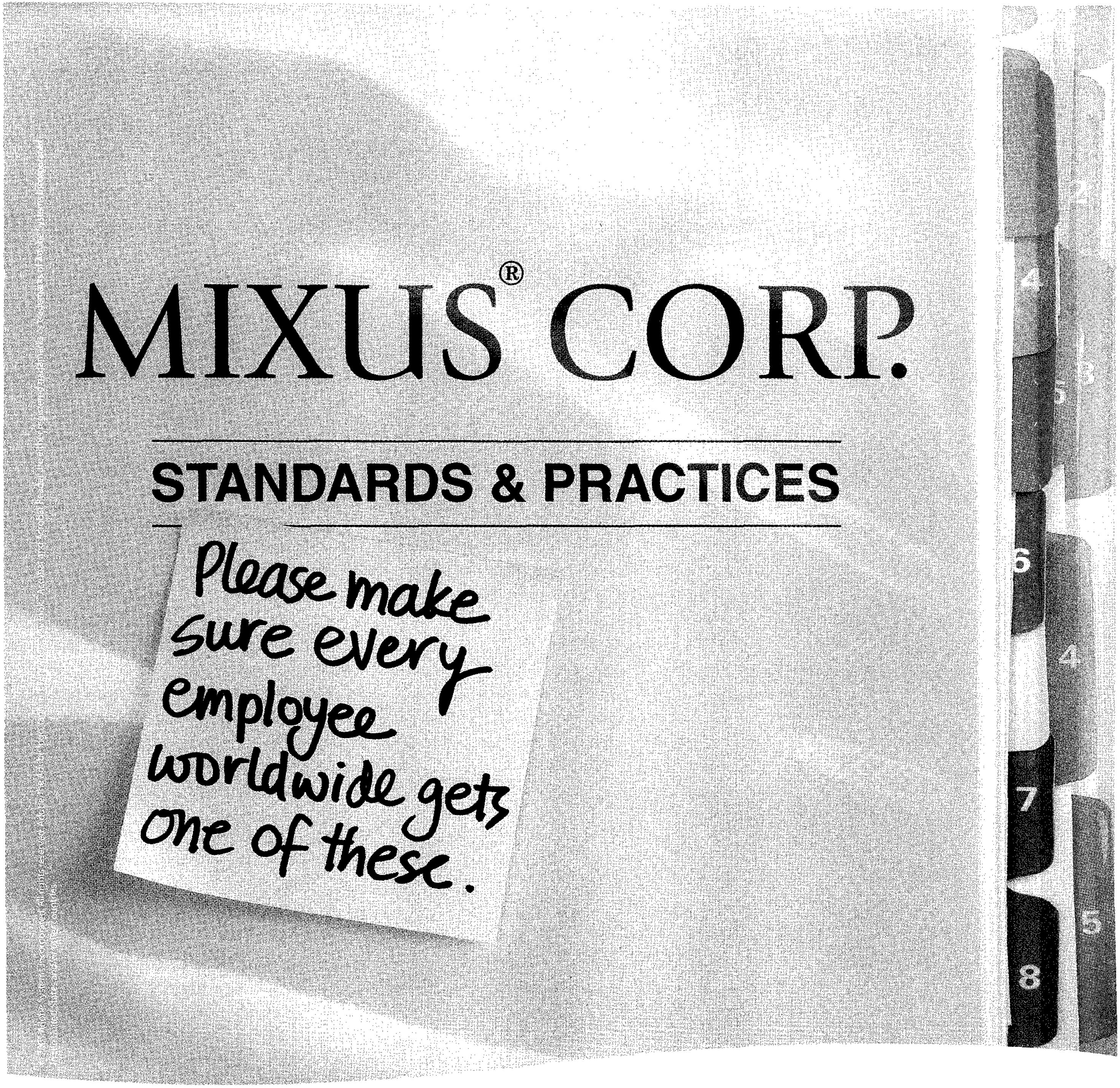
Throughout the hearing, Byron-Marasek dipped into her briefcase and pulled out sheets of paper and handwritten notes and pages downloaded from the Internet, and passed them to her latest lawyer, who had been retained the day before. The material documented infractions for which the Wild Animal Orphanage had been cited by the U.S.D.A. over the years—storing outdated bags of Monkey Chow in an unair-conditioned shed, for instance, and placing the carcass of a tiger in a meat freezer until its eventual necropsy and disposal. None of the infractions were serious and none remained unresolved, but they raised enough questions to delay the inevitable once again, and Judge Serpentelli adjourned to allow Byron-Marasek more time to present an alternate plan. "Throughout this period of time, I've made it clear that the court had no desire to inflict on Mrs. Marasek or the tigers any hardship," the Judge announced. "But the tigers must be removed. I have no discretion on the question of whether they should be removed, just how."

Before the state acts, however, there is a good chance that the Tiger Lady will have taken matters into her own hands. Last fall, in an interview with the Asbury Park *Press*, she said that she was in the process of "buying land elsewhere"—she seemed to think it unwise to name the state—and suggested that she and her dogs and her tigers might be leaving New Jersey for good. Typically, people who have disputes with the authorities about their animal collections move from one jurisdiction to another as they run into legal difficulties. If they do eventually lose their animals, they almost always resurface somewhere else with new ones: recidivism among hoarders is close to a hundred per cent. In the not too distant future, in some other still-rural corner of America, people may begin to wonder what smells so strange when the wind blows from a certain direction, and whether they actually could have heard a roar in the middle of the night, and whether there could be any truth to the rumors about a lady with a bunch of tigers in town.



I had been to Jackson countless times, circled the Maraseks' property, and walked up and down the sidewalks in The Preserve, but I had never seen a single tiger. I had even driven up to the Maraseks' front gate a couple of times and peered through it, and I could see some woolly white dogs scuffling behind a wire fence, and I could see tarps and building materials scattered around the house, but no tigers, no flash of orange fur, nothing. I wanted to see one of the animals, to assure myself that they really existed.

One afternoon, I parked across from the Winglers' and walked past their garage, where Kevin was still monkeying around with his Corvette, and then across their back yard and beyond where their lawn ended, where the woods thickened and the ground was springy from all the decades' worth of pine needles that have rained down, and I followed the tangy, slightly sour smell that I guessed was tiger, although I don't think I'd ever smelled tigers before. There was a chain-link fence up ahead. I stopped and waited. A minute passed and nothing happened. A minute more, and then a tiger walked past on the other side of the fence, its huge head lowered and its tail barely twitching, the black stripes of its coat crisscrossed with late-day light, its slow, heavy tread making no sound at all. It reached the end of the fence and paused, and turned back the other way, and then it was gone. ♦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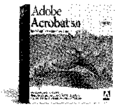
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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE FUGITIVE

Could a manuscript bought at auction be the work of a runaway slave?

BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Each year, Swann Galleries conducts an auction of "Printed & Manuscript African-Americana" at its offices at 104 East Twenty-fifth Street, in New York City. Last February, as I looked through the catalogue, I marvelled at the discarded artifacts represented in its pages—the shards and fragments that turn up periodically from the depths of the black past. Lot 20, for example, was a document "ordering several men to surrender a male slave to the sheriff against an unpaid debt." Lot 17 was the last will and testament of one Daniel Juzan, from Mobile, Alabama, with a bequest to the five children he'd had with "Justine a free woman of color who, now, lives with me." The catalogue description of Lot 30 particularly caught my attention:

> UNPUBLISHED ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT. Offered by Emily Driscoll in her 1948 catalogue, with her description reading in part, "a fictionalized biography, written in an effusive style, purporting to be the story of the early life and escape of one Hannah Crafts, a mulatto, born in Virginia." The manuscript consists of 21 chapters, each headed by an epigraph. The narrative is not only that of the mulatto Hannah, but also of her mistress who turns out to be a light-skinned woman passing for white. It is uncertain that this work is written by a "negro." The work is written by someone intimately familiar with the areas in the South where the narrative takes place. Her escape route is one sometimes used by run-aways.

The full title was given as "The Bondwoman's Narrative by Hannah Crafts, a Fugitive Slave, recently Escaped from North Carolina." The manuscript was three hundred and one pages, handwritten and clothbound, and was thought to have come from New Jersey, "circa 1850s."

Could "The Bondwoman's Narrative" have been written by a runaway slave? The possibility didn't seem entirely far-fetched. The catalogue said that the manuscript came from the monumental private collection of Dorothy Porter Wesley (1905-95), a librarian and historian at Howard University. Wesley was one of the most famous black bibliophiles of the twentieth century, second only perhaps to Arthur Schomburg, whose collection formed the basis of the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library.

Wesley's scholarship helped define the canon of antebellum black writing, in which slave narratives—a form of African-American autobiography that documents the "peculiar institution" from the inside—play an important part. Wesley's ownership of "The Bondwoman's Narrative," and the manuscript's claim to be the work of a runaway slave, made me hopeful that Lot 30 could be historically significant.

Nearly a hundred slave narratives were published as books or pamphlets between 1760 and 1865. (Another hundred were published between 1865 and 1930, by people who had been liberated by the Civil War.) As a genre, these narratives were closely bound up with the abolitionist movement. After 1831, the authors often appeared at abolitionist rallies to give speeches and promote their books. Frederick Douglass's classic "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself," published in 1845, sold approximately thirty thousand copies in five years.

The genre was so popular that several white authors published fictionalized slave narratives, but the number of white authors in the nineteenth century known to have engaged in racial ventriloquism is fewer than a dozen. There was little commercial advantage to be gained by a white writer adopting a black author's persona. Harriet Beecher Stowe had redefined the function—and the economic and political potential—of the novel by writing about blacks, rather than as a black. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which came out in 1852, sold an un-

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The author writes as a keen insider, capturing the way black people talked to each other when white auditors were not around, and not as abolitionists thought they did.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

precedented three hundred thousand copies in its first year, and Stowe's next antislavery novel, "Dred" (1856), sold two hundred thousand copies before the end of the century. Stowe's novels, in fact, sold hundreds of thousands more copies than all the black-written slave narratives combined.

In the robust field of nineteenth-century African-American literature, handwritten manuscripts, or holographs, are exceedingly rare. A large number of published slave narratives, autobiographies, sermons, novels, books of poetry, political tracts, and scientific works have survived, but to my knowledge there is not one remaining holograph of a slave narrative or novel, even by such established authors as Frederick Douglass, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, or William Wells Brown. If "The Bondwoman's Narrative" was based on actual experience, it could be our first pristine encounter with the unadulterated "voice" of a fugitive slave, exactly as she wrote and edited it. Crafts may even have been the first black female novelist. (At present, that distinction belongs to Harriet E. Wilson, the author of "Our Nig," which was published in 1859. Wilson was born free in the North.)

When Lot 30 went to auction, on February 15, 2001, I acted on a hunch, and had a friend bid eighty-five hundred dollars for it on my behalf. I was the only bidder, and found myself in possession of a fragile, yellowing manuscript, written in faded brown ink on paper ruled with faint blue lines. Given its probable age, and the uncertainty of its whereabouts for long stretches of time, I was astonished to see that it was intact. It consisted of folios—sheets of stationery folded in half to make two leaves and four pages. The author had made numerous corrections, scribbling in changes and pasting on inserts, so it was clear that this was a working manuscript. Crafts's lines ran deep into the binding, which indicated that the manuscript was bound some time after she wrote it.

"The Bondwoman's Narrative" is a quirky novel—part gothic, part sentimental, part slave narrative—strewn with slightly inaccurate Biblical epigraphs (Proverbs' "seven abominations" becomes "severe abominations") and the occasional Latin expression ("*sic transit gloria mundi*," the narrator says of the ruin that befalls a slaveholding plantation). Allusions throughout to Byron, the Medes and the Persians, Heracleitus, and Orestes reflect the eclectic reading habits of a highly motivated individual devouring the arbitrary selections of a small library in a middle-class, mid-century American home. The absence of any reference to the Civil War or to secession strongly suggests that the manuscript was composed before 1861.

The identity of the author is a mystery, but Hannah, the narrator, is a fair-skinned, snobbish, literate household slave, uncannily like the tragic mulatto stock figure found in later American literature. She begins her life on a haunted plantation in Virginia, the property of the Vincent family. Eventually, she moves to Washington, D.C., to work for Mrs. Wheeler, a politician's wife, two of whose slaves have run away. The family relocates to North Carolina, where the vain and vindictive Mrs. Wheeler tries to force Hannah to marry a field slave. Hannah, in effect, describes the union as a rape—"most horrible of all doomed to association with the vile, foul, filthy in-

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habitants of the huts, and condemned to receive one of them for my husband." Rather than accept her fate, she runs away to New Jersey, disguised as a white boy.

Hannah's escape is compellingly similar to the sensational but true story of Ellen Craft and her husband, William, which was published in Frederick Douglass's newspaper, *The North Star*, on July 20, 1849. Ellen Craft, a mulatto, disguised herself as a male invalid and, with her dark-skinned husband passing as her servant, travelled by train from Macon, Georgia, to Philadelphia. The story was widely reported in the abolitionist press; William's account of their escape later appeared in his own slave narrative, "Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom," which was published in 1860.

The preface to Hannah Crafts's novel claims, like many slave narratives, to present "a record of plain unvarnished facts," a truth "stranger than fiction," so I hoped I would uncover some historical correspondences to what the novel described. Slave narrators often took pains to be as precise as possible, naming their tormentors and specifying the details of their servitude, in order to prevent their stories from being discredited. Advocates of slavery scrutinized the writings of fugitive slaves for errors—any excuse to deny the slaves' depictions of the abuses they endured—and they sometimes charged that the true authors were abolitionists, not slaves. When Frederick Douglass published his "Narrative," A. C. C. Thompson, a neighbor of one of his former masters, wrote a letter to a newspaper in which he contended that, having known Douglass as a slave, he doubted that Douglass could have written such a sophisticated narrative: He "was an unlearned, and rather an ordinary negro, and I am confident he was not capable of writing the narrative alluded to."

Like Douglass, Crafts's narrator is at pains to explain her literacy. Both write about their efforts to teach themselves by examining old books, and both eventually became the pupils of white women. Among slaveowners, as Douglass puts it in the "Narrative," the worry was that "learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. . . . It would forever unfit him to be a slave." Douglass described reading as "the pathway from slavery to freedom." Hannah's master, too, feared that education made slaves "less subservient to their superiors," and, indeed, literacy turned her into "a being to whom a new world with all its mysteries was opening."

With Douglass's descriptions of distances and locations, one could draw a map, but Crafts rarely uses specific names, places, or dates. She is more of a storyteller than a chronicler, and she may have had good reason to fictionalize her experiences. By the time she wrote her novel, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was in place. Under this law, which was not abolished until 1864, masters could reclaim even slaves who had fled across the Mason-Dixon Line into the supposedly free North, so accuracy might have been dangerous. Yet there are a few points at which Hannah's story appears to coincide with historical fact. She sets the first part of her narrative near Milton, Virginia, and the Milton that is found in Charles City County, on a bend in the James River, southeast of Richmond, fits her description of the region. The surnames of several characters in the novel appear in the Virginia census between 1830 and 1850. She refers in passing to a Frederick Hawkins, and there was a man by that name living in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, nineteen miles from Milton, according to the censuses of 1810 and 1820. She mentions an "equestrian statue of Jackson," and a statue of Andrew Jackson was erected in Washington, D.C., in 1853. She describes the winter in Washington with the vividness of someone who may have seen it for herself:

> Gloom everywhere Gloom up the Potomac; where it rolls among meadows no longer green, and by splendid country seats Gloom down the Potomac where it washes the sides of huge war-ships Gloom on the marshes, the fields, and heights Gloom settling steadily down over the sumptuous habitations of the rich, and creeping through the cellars of the poor Gloom arresting the steps of chance office-seekers, and bewildering the heads of grave and reverend Senators; for with fog, and drizzle, and a sleety driving mist the night has come at least two hours before its time

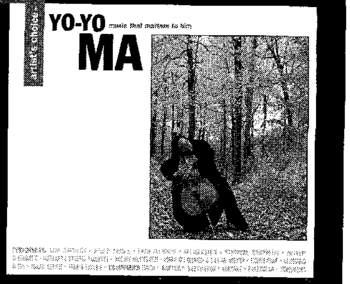
In one respect, Crafts's vagueness actually lends authenticity: her reluctance to divulge the particulars of Hannah's escape. "I cannot describe my journey," she writes. "My course was due North." Some slave narrators tended to remain silent or sketchy about their routes and their methods in order to protect future runaways from slave catchers. Frederick Douglass severely criticized Henry (Box) Brown, who was shipped from Richmond to Philadelphia in a crate, for revealing in print the method of his escape and thereby making it more difficult for others. But Crafts's narrator does give some tantalizing details: she describes hiding out in dens and hollows during the day, and running at night; she refers to the coalfields in western Virginia; and she says that she took a ship to her freedom in New Jersey.

The provenance of "The Bondwoman's Narrative" is murky. From two of Dorothy Porter Wesley's documents that were included in Lot 30, I learned that Wesley had bought the manuscript for eighty-five dollars sometime after 1948 from Emily Driscoll, a manuscript-and-autograph dealer who kept a shop on Fifth Avenue. Driscoll dated the manuscript to before 1860. She had acquired it from a travelling book scout, who told her that it came from New Jersey. After buying the manuscript, Wesley made a number of valuable observations about the text. She wrote that it reflected "first-hand knowledge of estate life in Virginia." She calls the text a "manuscript novel" and a "fictionalized personal narrative." From this, I deduced that she felt the novel could be autobiographical. Most important, Wesley firmly believed that the author was an African-American woman, a supposition based in part on the depiction of black characters. "There is no doubt that she was a Negro," Wesley wrote, "because her approach to other Negroes is that they are people first of all. Only as the story unfolds, in most instances, does it become apparent that they are Negroes."

White writers of the eighteen-fifties (and well beyond) tended to introduce Negro characters awkwardly. In "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Mose and Pete, Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe's sons, are "a couple of woolly-headed boys." Aunt Chloe appears with a "round, black, shining face." Uncle Tom is "a full glossy black," possessing "a face [with] truly African features." By contrast, black authors often commented on the variety of colors found among the slaves, asserting their individuality rather than presenting them en masse. (This also gave credibility to the miscegenation that many in the South denied.) Crafts, too, evokes the colors and characteristics of the black people in her novel, but she generally does so only *after* they've been introduced. Toward the end of the novel, when we meet two fugitive slaves, Jacob and his sister, Crafts describes them as "the figures of two people . . . the voices were those of a man and a woman." Only later does she tell us that Jacob was "a black man." For Stowe and other white writers, a character's blackness is often his most noteworthy quality.

Crafts writes as an opinionated, keen insider, capturing the way black people talked to, and about, each other when white auditors were not around—not as abolitionists thought they talked, and not as black authors imagined they should talk, or wanted white readers to believe they talked. And Crafts is candid about her feelings toward other slaves. Her portrayal of the field slaves' living conditions demonstrates both her sense of superiority and her understanding of the dehumanizing misery of slavery. In language that is unusually potent—even in a genre whose political efficacy depended on vivid writing—Crafts conjures the squalor of "the huts," and articulates the tensions between house slaves and field slaves:

> There was not that division of families I had been accustomed to see, but they all lived promiscuously anyhow and every how; at least they did not die, which was a wonder Is it a stretch of imagination to say that by night they contained a swarm of misery, that crowds of foul existence crawled in out of gaps in walls and boards, or coiled themselves to sleep on ~~nauseous~~ nauseous heaps of straw fetid with human perspiration and where the rain drips in, ~~and the midnight dew imparts some~~ and the damp airs of mid-



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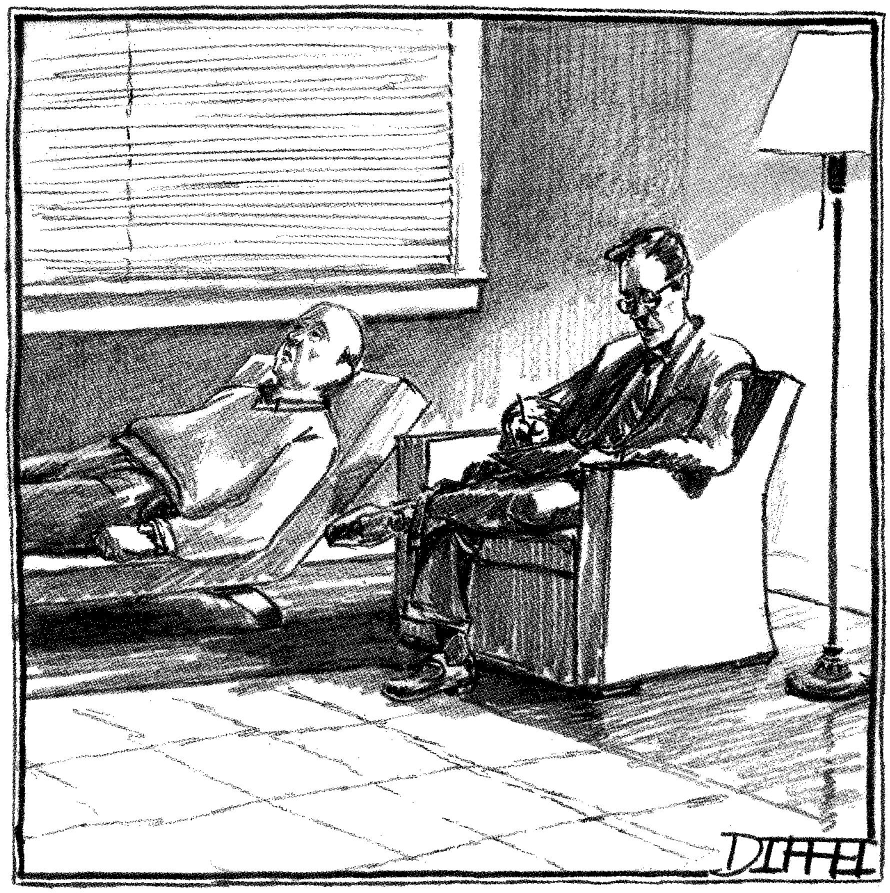


"These feelings of inadequacy are common among the inadequate."

> night fatch and carry malignant fevers. . . .
>
> Many of these huts ~~now very ancient They~~ were even older than the nation, and had been occupied by successive generations of slaves The greatest curse of slavery is it's heriditary character The father leaves to his son an inheritance of toil and misery, and his place on the fetid straw in the miserable corner, with no hope or possibility of anything better And the son in his turn transmits the same to his offspring and thus forever
>
> If the huts were bad, the inhabitants it seemed were still worse Degradation, neglect, and ill treatment had wrought on them its legitimate effects All day they toil beneath the burning sun, scarcely conscious that any link exists between themselves and other portions of the human race Their mental condition is briefly summed up in the phrase that they know nothing ~~care for nothing, and hope for nothing~~

The author of "The Bondwoman's Narrative" seems not only to have had personal experience of plantation life but also to have been intimately acquainted with the humiliation of servitude. Of Mrs. Wheeler she writes, "I never felt so poor, so weak, so utterly subjected to the authority of another, as when that woman with her soft voice and suavity of manner, yet withal so stern and inflexible told me that I was hers body and soul, and that she did and would exact obedience in all cases and under all circumstances." Elsewhere, she writes:

> Those who suppose that southern ladies keep their attendants at a distance, scarcely speaking to them, or only to give commands have a very erroneous impression Between the mistress and her slave a freedom exists probably not to be found elsewhere A northern woman would have recoiled at the idea of communicating a private history to one of my race, and in my condition, whereas such a thought never occurred to Mrs Wheeler

Crafts writes about slavery as a lived experience. "Those who think that the greatest evils of slavery are connected with physical suffering possess no just or rational ideas of human nature," she maintains. "The soul, the immortal soul must ever long and yearn for a thousand things inseperable to liberty." Crafts, I was coming to believe, might have been an example of what Ralph Ellison called " 'free-floating' literacy," a phenomenon that was surprisingly prevalent among blacks of the nineteenth century.

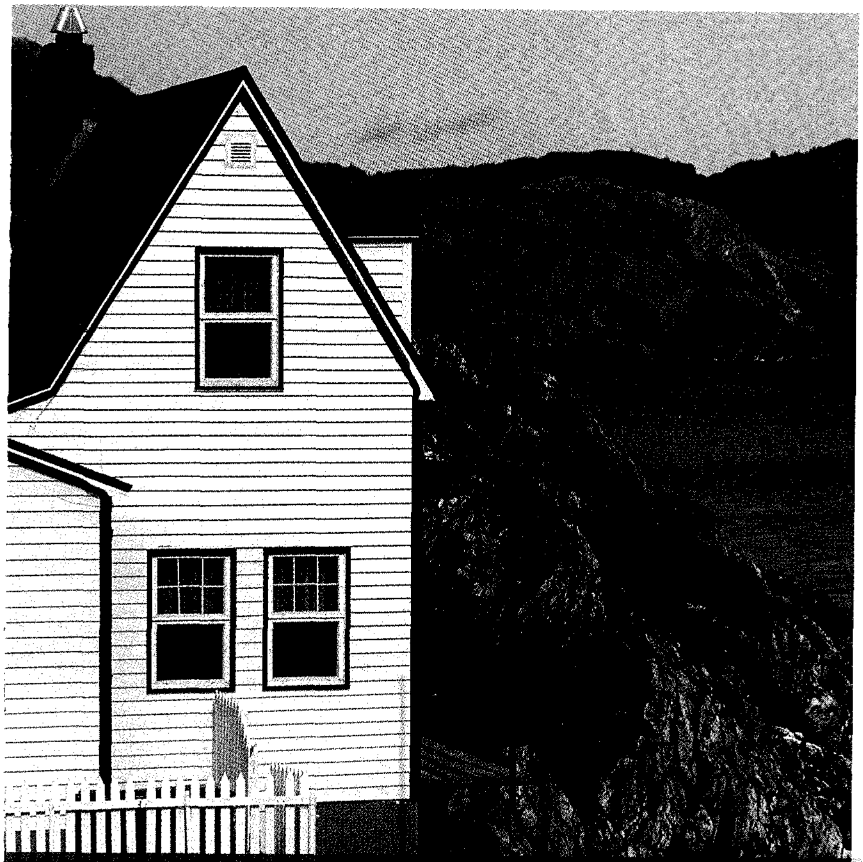
A friend recommended that I ask Kenneth W. Rendell, a well-known dealer in historical documents, who exposed the fraud of the "Hitler Diaries" in 1983, to establish the exact age of the manuscript. If "The Bondwoman's Narrative" had been written before the Civil War, the ink would most likely have been iron gallotannate,which was made from oak gallnuts, iron sulfate, and gum, and was widely used in the eighteen-fifties. I took the manuscript to Rendell's office, in a neo-Victorian mansion in South Natick, Massachusetts. I met him in the antechamber of what appeared to be an old-fashioned bank vault, complete with a lock that spun like a ship's wheel. Rendell's rarest editions and documents, including autographs of the Founding Fathers and first editions of James Joyce and Mark Twain, were housed here.

Rendell, a deliberate, elegant man in his late fifties, invited me to peer down the lens of his microscope at one of the pages of the book. The ink had a rusty-brown, mottled appearance. "What you are looking at, young man," he said grandly, "is iron-gall ink." Originally black, the ink had turned a rusty color as its iron component oxidized. Rendell thought it likely that the manuscript had been composed as early as 1855.

On Rendell's advice, I sent the manuscript to Joe Nickell, an investigator and historical-document examiner in Buffalo, New York, who became famous, in 1993, for debunking what was purported to be Jack the Ripper's diary. Six weeks later, I received a forty-nine-page report in the mail.

Nickell had used visual, chemical, and microscopic criteria to determine and date the writing materials: dark-to-light progressions in the color of the ink suggested that Crafts had used a dip pen, which had to be refilled from an inkwell periodically; the absence of nib tracks indicated that she had worked with a goose quill (all but abandoned as a writing implement by the end of the Civil War); and, most important, one of the four types of paper she used bore an embossment that dates to the second half of the eighteen-fifties.

Nickell found internal evidence that



MAKING NEWS

ON LOCATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

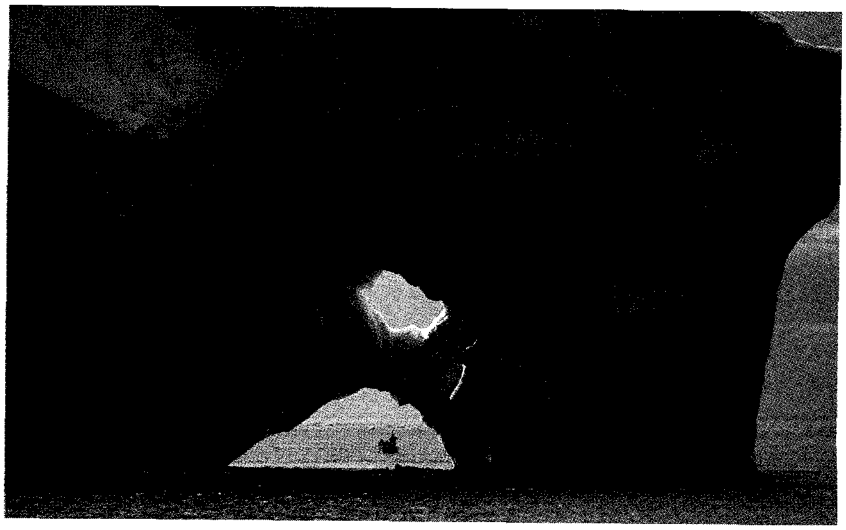
In Annie Proulx's award-winning novel **The Shipping News**, readers were as entranced by the moving story and its characters as they were by the dramatic setting of the tale. A rough, rugged, and uncompromisingly beautiful island off Canada's Atlantic coast, Newfoundland first stirred Proulx's imagination when she took note of a series of mysterious names and places on a map of the Canadian province.

PROULX'S MUSE

Lured by the prospect of visiting and discovering the stories behind such sites as Seldom Come By, Exploits River, Witless Bay, and Bay of Hope, Proulx journeyed to Newfoundland and was transfixed. "Within ten minutes after arriving, I had fallen in love," she recalls.

Indeed, Newfoundland and Labrador proved to be Proulx's muse. To learn more about the Canadian province, she spent time with Newfoundlanders, venturing out of the coves with fishermen on their boats. She heard their stories, and listened to local music and song. "Everywhere I went, I fell into conversations with people. Newfoundlanders are good talkers and everybody's got stories."

"The Shipping News," Proulx's Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning novel, chronicles a hapless newspaperman's journey of self-discovery when he returns to his ancestral home in Newfoundland. Punctuated with detailed instruction on an array of nautical knots, Proulx's story unfolds in a climate of both natural beauty and severity. When it came to adapting the book for film, Proulx had only one prerequisite: she was adamant that at least some of it be shot on the coastal Canadian island.



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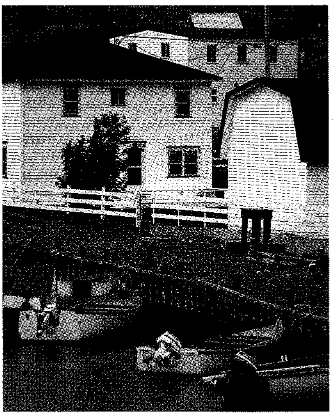
▶ ▶

▩ NEWS FOOTAGE

Academy Award-nominated director Lasse Hallström ("Chocolat," "Cider House Rules," and "My Life As A Dog") heartily agreed with Proulx's view that Newfoundland's landscape, carved by glaciers and surrounded by churning waters and a big sky, was elemental to "The Shipping News." "You can't recreate the look of Newfoundland, and the inspiration of that place," notes Hallström. "The real world offers so much more inspiration on tangible and intangible levels. Meeting the locals, and getting to know the people there," he says, "was the experience of a lifetime."

Hallström's "Shipping News," nominated for two Golden Globes, stars Kevin Spacey, Julianne Moore, Judi Dench, and Cate Blanchett. Shot on location throughout the island, the Miramax film captures the distinctive essence of Newfoundland so brilliantly conjured by Proulx's prose.



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Topping the list of location sites was the community of New Bonaventure in the Trinity Bight area. Joined by two breathtaking headlands—Horse Chops and Bonaventure Head—Trinity Bight is comprised of twelve outport communities, home to some two thousand Newfoundlanders, most of whom are descendents of eighteenth-century settlers from England's West Country and the Channel Islands. Three hours from the provincial capital, St. John's, Trinity Bight boasts settings relatively unchanged since the turn of the century. Vintage locations in the film include The Deck Restaurant in Port Blanford, starring as the set for Skipper Will's Diner; houses in Trinity Bay, providing the locale for Wavey's daycare center; and Herring Cove, the site for Agnis's shop.

▩ ENCHANTING SURPRISES

The cast and crew of "The Shipping News," like any visitors to the island, marveled at the spectacular physical landscape, as well as some remarkable sitings like those of a moose wandering across a plain, an iceberg looming on the horizon, and a school of whales breaking the waves just off the coast of the Horse Chops headland.

Any trip to Newfoundland and Labrador guarantees a similar raft of discovery and wonder. From the oldest street in North America in St. John's to the geological wonders of Pre-Cambrian cliffs towering thousands of feet above landlocked fjords to the habitats of arctic hare and woodland caribou, Newfoundland and Labrador beckons.

top right: © Raymond K. Gehman/National Geographic; bottom: © Miramax Films, photo Doane Gregory

DISCOVERING NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Getting There

Marine Atlantic modern car ferries run year-round from North Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques in southwestern Newfoundland (800-341-7981). **Air Canada** operates regular flights to the island from major cities in the United States and Canada (888-247-2262). For a special **Shipping News Tour**, call 800-567-6666.

Where to Stay

Fishers' Loft Inn by Ship Cove A four-star inn overlooking a picturesque fishing port. Port Rexton (877-464-3240). **Tickle Inn at Cape Onion** A restored heritage home featuring original furnishings. Cape Onion (709-739-5503). **Quirpon Lighthouse Inn** An island getaway adjacent to a working lighthouse. Quirpon Island, near L'Anse aux Meadows (877-254-6586).

Where to Eat

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The Pepper Mill Comfortable haute cuisine.
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Cabot Club at the Fairmont Newfoundland Fresh seafood, local cuisine, great views.
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Canada

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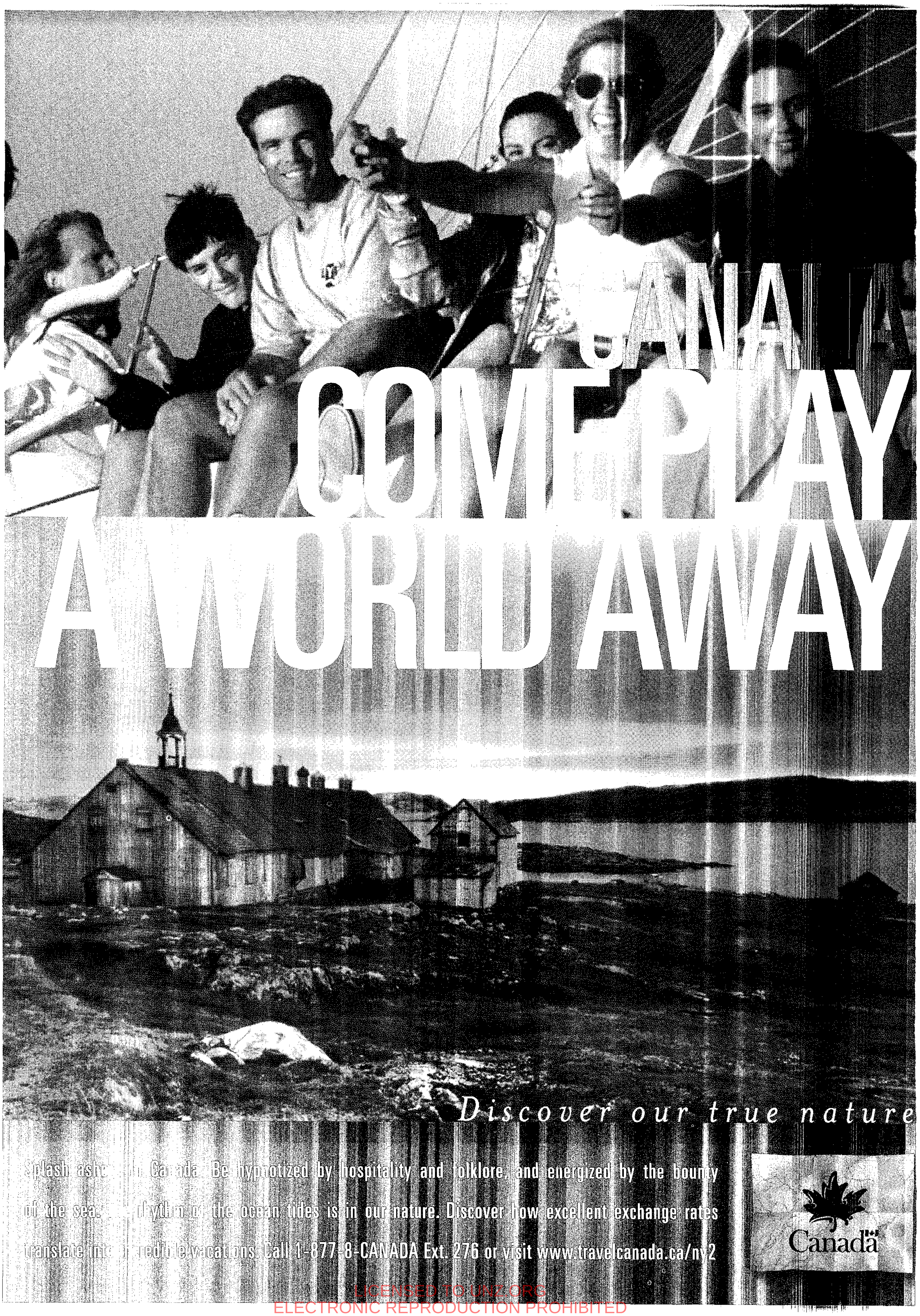
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Canadä

the author of the manuscript was probably a young woman who lacked a formal education, judging from her "serviceable" handwriting, her "relative slowness" in writing ("more for legibility than speed"), and her "eccentric" punctuation. Crafts never uses periods; she uses semicolons idiosyncratically; and she places both apostrophes and quotation marks at the baseline, as if they were commas. Her handwriting, he notes, is in a style called "modified roundhand," unlike "the minuscule script sometimes affected by Victorian ladies." All in all, according to Nickell, these peculiarities amount to "a measure of unsophistication on the part of the writer," which was "consistent with someone who struggled to learn." To me, this sounded like a person whose encounters with reading and writing were informal, intermittent, and furtive. Nickell pointed to Crafts's use of polysyllables—words like "magnanimity," "obsequious," and "vicissitudes"—as proof that she was not "an unread person." Her misspellings, though, are legion: "saloons" for "salons," "ropose" for "repose," "greup" for "grope." The curious combination of these two tendencies is another sign of the autodidact.

Toward the end of his report, Nickell said he felt that "the novel may be based on actual experiences," citing Crafts's unusual treatment of two of the characters' names:

> There are changes that may be due to fictionalization of real persons or events, such as the change of "Charlotte" to "Susan." More telling, perhaps, is the fact that the name "Wheeler" in the narrative was first written cryptically, for example as "Mr. Wh_r" and "Mrs. Wh_r," but then later was overwritten with the missing "eele" in each case to complete the novel.

This observation led me back to something I remembered reading in Dorothy Porter Wesley's notes. She had mentioned coming across a John Hill Wheeler who held several minor government positions in Washington—clearly, she suspected that he was Hannah's owner—but there is no record of her having pursued this clue.

Following Wesley's cold trail, I found that for a month or so in 1855 John Hill Wheeler (1806-82) became perhaps the most famous slaveholder in America. Wheeler was born in Murfreesboro, North Carolina. Between 1827 and 1854, he served in the North Carolina House of Commons for various periods, and in 1854 was appointed the United States minister to Nicaragua. Wheeler was an ardent defender of slavery. As William L. Andrews, the author of a definitive study of the slave narrative ("To Tell a Free Story"), pointed out to me, in 1855 Wheeler was a petitioner in the case of Passmore Williamson, one of the most prominent challenges to the Fugitive Slave Act. This fact helped me form a crucial link between Crafts's story and a historical event: the escape of a slave named Jane Johnson, who most probably was Hannah's predecessor in the Wheeler household.

I began to read the accounts of the case, first published in the New York *Tribune* and in a pamphlet that was printed in 1855 by the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society. An extraordinary drama unfolded. On July 18, 1855, Wheeler arrived in Philadelphia from Washington, D.C., with Johnson and her two sons. From Philadelphia, they were to travel to New York by boat, and then on to Nicaragua, where Wheeler would take up his position. Philadelphia was known as a hotbed of abolitionists, and Wheeler had instructed Johnson to tell any black person who asked that she was free. But, as soon as she was left alone, Johnson took a chance and told two black people that she was a slave and wished to escape. (She had been planning to flee once they arrived in New York, and had sewed a new suit of clothes as a disguise, but she recognized this immediate opportunity.) A messenger alerted William Still, a prominent black abolitionist, who later related Johnson's escape in his book, "The Underground Railroad" (1872). Still summoned Passmore Williamson, the white secretary of an organization called "The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and for the Relief of Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage, and for improving the condition of the African Race," and they assembled a group of men to rescue Johnson and her sons. They rushed to the boat and persuaded Johnson to flee with them. According to Still, when Johnson rose to leave Wheeler attempted to interfere, taking hold of her and Williamson. Williamson shook Wheeler off, and the party left the boat. Johnson was later

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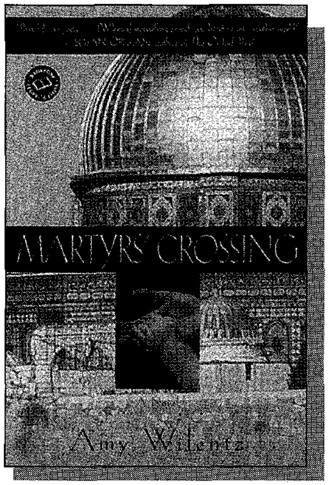

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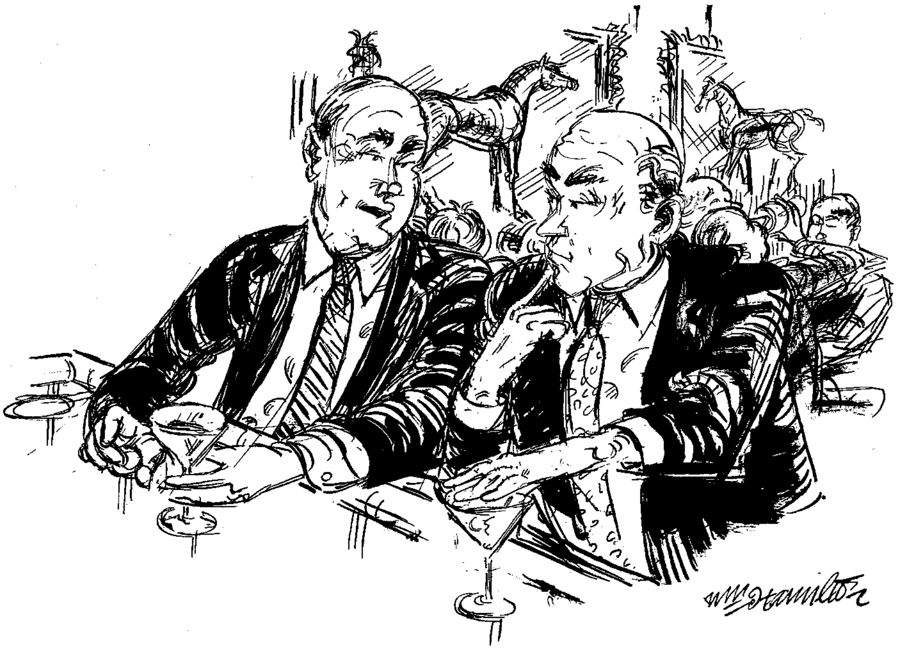


"She's got a wonderful place in Vermont and a great little short-term memory."

said to proclaim that she and her sons had been "providentially delivered from the house of bondage."

Williamson, apprehended by the police, was sent to jail, and the "half a dozen colored men" (including Still) who had assisted with Johnson's escape were accused of "riot," "forcible abduction," and "assault and battery," and were forced to stand trial. Johnson, whom Still describes as "tall and well formed," with a "high and large forehead, of genteel manners, chestnut color," made a dramatic appearance in court. Wearing a veil, she testified on behalf of the accused. She said that she had been "perfectly willing and desirous to go." She added, "I did not say I did not want my freedom; I have always wanted it; I did not say I wanted to go with my master; I went very willingly to the carriage, I was very glad to go."

Still was acquitted; two of the other black men were found guilty of assault and battery, and served a week in jail. For failing to coöperate with the court, Williamson was found guilty of contempt, and served a sentence of several months. After Johnson testified, she boarded a carriage and disappeared, leaving Wheeler to complain in his diary, which is stored among his papers at the Library of Congress, that he was never able to recover his property.

Something nagged at me as I read more about the case, an echo of a name that Crafts had used in her text. Suddenly, I remembered a scene from "The Bondwoman's Narrative," in which Hannah is fixing Mrs. Wheeler's hair:

> "Be careful" she exclaimed "My hair, I expect, is excessively tangled, as it hasn't been combed for more than a week"
>
> "Indeed, madam"
>
> ~~It's more than a week I think, yes I know it is~~
>
> "I was too feeble to think of attempting it myself, and since Jane ran off, there has been no one to whom I could think of entrusting my head"

This Jane, I realized with a thrill, must have been the same one who escaped from the Wheelers in Philadelphia in 1855.

How could I ever find Hannah Crafts? If her tale was a fiction—or was fictionalized—how could I verify that she had once been a slave, and was a fugitive "recently escaped from North Carolina," as the book's subtitle claimed? Nickell's report declared that I possessed a manuscript that had been written sometime between 1853 and 1861—a manuscript that read like a novel despite its title and its claims to be a slave narrative, and that, in all probability, had been written by a black woman who may have wished never to be found. Yet so much of Hannah's story rang true, especially her account of the master-slave relationship, her depictions of life in Virginia, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C., and her various passages about the routes and the methods of escape adopted by fugitive slaves.

I looked for Crafts in the 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 federal-census indexes maintained by the Mormon Family History Library. I was familiar with its Accelerated Indexing System, a wonderful tool that includes an alphabetical list of the names recorded in each federal census starting in 1790. There are numerous problems with census records, not the least of which are human error, poor spellings, phonetic spellings, and the fact that some people falsify their birth date or birthplace, their ethnic identity, or their level of literacy. Not everyone wants to be located or identified, especially if he or she has reason to forge a new identity. Many former slaves never could be certain of their birth dates in the first place.

I learned, to my chagrin, that Hannah Crafts (and the variants—Craft, Kraft, Krafts, Croft, Kroft, Craff, and so on) had become a very popular name for blacks and whites alike by the middle of the nineteenth century. The fictional Hannah ends up in New Jersey, where she settles in a community of free blacks, marries a Methodist clergyman, and becomes a schoolteacher. By 1870, there were a number of all-black communities in New Jersey, including Skunk Hollow, in Bergen County; Guineatown, Lawnside, and Saddlertown, in Camden County; Timbuctoo, in Burlington County; and Gouldtown and Springtown, in Cumberland County. The obvious problem with an autobiographical novel is determining where fact leaves off and fiction begins. Still, the New Jersey provenance of the manuscript supported this line of inquiry. Only one Hannah Craft turned up in the New Jersey census of 1860, in the town of Hillsborough, in Somerset County. She was thirty-four years old, and white. She didn't live in New Jersey before 1860, and her entry listed no birthplace—hers was the only entry on this page of the census without one. I couldn't help wondering if this Hannah Craft could be passing for white, given her imperilled and vulnerable status as a fugitive slave.

I found a Maria H. Crafts in the Freedman's Bank Records, newly available on CD-ROM from the Mormon Family History Library. The bank, founded by white philanthropists and businessmen in 1865, provided a mutual-savings depository for freed people. By 1874, when it collapsed, there were sixty thousand depositors, whose savings totalled nearly three million dollars. Maria H. Crafts applied to open an account at a branch in New Orleans a few months before the crash. On the application, she listed her birthplace as Massachusetts or Mississippi (the handwriting is unclear), and identified herself as a schoolteacher. She is listed as white, which probably means that she was an especially fair mulatto, given that the bank had been established for blacks. Significantly, she had signed the application herself.

I immediately sent a copy of this document to Nickell, for a comparison with the handwriting in "The Bondwoman's Narrative." The closest thing to a signature for Hannah Crafts is her handwritten name, which appears on the novel's title page. The difference, Nickell told me, was marked. But, he continued, "Because of the lapse of twenty years, during which time her handwriting may have changed, and because we are not comparing signature to signature, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that this is the handwriting of the same person."

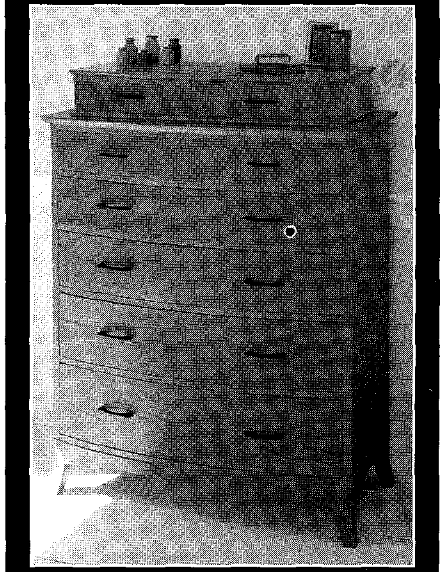
When Nina Kollars, my research assistant, was typing the manuscript, it occurred to her that I should look for Hannah under the name Vincent, since she had been a slave of the Vincents in Virginia, and may have taken Vincent as her surname. (My surname is Gates because my ancestors belonged to a man named Horatio Gates, who lived in Berkeley Springs, in what is now West Virginia.) An 1887 source mentions a Hannah Vincent in the records of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Burlington, New Jersey. In addition to other roles she filled in the church, she is described as a teacher. According to the census of 1870, a Hannah Vincent, aged forty-six, was living in the household of Thomas Vincent, aged forty-eight. He was black; she was a mulatto. He was a porter in a liquor store; she was "keeping house." Both were said to have been born in Pennsylvania. In the 1880 census, Hannah—now claiming that she was just forty-eight—is listed as Thomas's wife, but both are now said to have been born in New Jersey. Nonetheless, given the Methodist and Vincent connections, this person, like Maria H. Crafts, remains a possible author of "The Bondwoman's Narrative." There is also a chance that Hannah Crafts was a pseudonym—if so, the author could have adopted the name as an homage to Ellen Craft, the mulatto who slipped out of slavery by dressing as a white man.

Given the extent of the circumstantial evidence, I believe that Dorothy Porter Wesley's intuition was correct. Everything I'd learned suggested that Crafts was a mulatto, the former slave of John Hill Wheeler, and an ambitious autodidact. (Remarkably, a list of the books in Wheeler's library was discovered last summer by Bryan Sinche, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina. This development will allow scholars to trace the author's literary influences more precisely.) Her observations about slave life are sharp and unsparing. We also know that she believed native intelligence, diligence, and hard work should be the ultimate measures of individual worth and success. Above all, she gave Hannah the courage to refuse a forced marriage—one she considered to be a form of rape. She would not romanticize coerced sexual relations even within the race.

Why was Hannah Crafts's novel never published? In addition to the nearly insurmountable difficulties that any nineteenth-century black female author would have encountered, Crafts's use of the first-person voice in a fictionalized slave narrative might have compromised the story's viability. Veracity was essential to the critical and commercial success of an ex-slave's tale, and to its political usefulness. Whatever the reason, though, Crafts evidently wanted her story to be read. She, and several generations of her descendants, carefully preserved the manuscript, making possible its reëmergence a century and a half after it was written. ♦

A passage from "The Bondwoman's Narrative" appears on page 116.

THOS. MOSER
CABINETMAKERS



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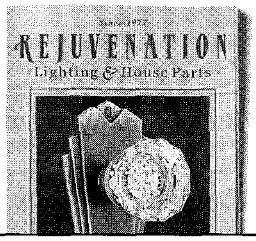

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A NEW MASTER

From "The Bondwoman's Narrative," by Hannah Crafts

After exhausting a sleepless night in vain efforts to compose my mind and become reconciled to the fate that probably awaited me I arose in the morning really ill, nervous, and disheartened ~~with a despondency~~. The old man servant came with my breakfast. It was good, but I could not eat. Mental anxiety precluded the gratification of the senses, and I turned with loathing from the snowy bread and golden butter. It seemed like preparation for the sacrifice.

"You had much better eat" he said "as there's a long journey before you to-day."

"What kind of journey?" I inquired.

"Why you're sold" he answered in evident surprise that I was unaware of such an important change in my affairs.

"To whom?"

"Why to Saddler, the slave-trader but maybe I hadn't ought to tell you" he continued.

"Are you sure of this?"

"Surtin I am" and a grinning sort of demoniacal smile he carried away the breakfast things.

In most cases there is something horrible in the idea of being bought and sold; it sent a thrill to my heart, a shiver through my brain. For a moment I felt dizzy, but a moment only. I had experienced too much trouble and anxiety to be overwhelmed by this. Then, too, I thought that though my perishable body was at their disposal, my soul was beyond their reach. They could never quench my immortality, shake my abiding faith and confidence in God, or destroy my living assurance in the efficacy of the dying Saviour's blood.

The old man, however, was mistaken. I was not sold, ~~though~~ though every thing was tending to that consummation. Towards noon I heard the roll of wheels and the tramp of horse's feet, evidently approaching the house. To these noises succeeded the echoing footsteps of a man, then there was a murmur of voices in an adjoining apartment and presently the door communicating with mine was thrown open; while some one said audibly "There she is." I knew the voice to be Mr Trappe's, but a stranger ~~a~~ answered "Why Trappe I thought you said that she was beautiful; in my eye she's excessively homely."

"But you ~~haven't seen the good~~ haven't seen her good points yet" said Trappe "walk in and take a fair estimate of her attractions, they are neither small nor few."

Both men came in, while I shrunk into a distant corner.

"Nay: Hannah, that won't do" said Trappe. "Come out here and show yourself. I don't think Mr Saddler ever saw a better looking wench. Come out I say."

I obeyed reluctantly.

"Now I'll tell you what" said Trappe. "You won't find a nicer bit of woman's flesh to be bought for that money in old Virginia. Don't you see what a foot she has, so dainty and delicate, and what an ankle. I don't see how in conscience you can expect me to take any less. Why you'd make a small fortune of her at that rate."

"How you talk" said Saddler. "I've bought finer wenches often and often for less money. Then you see she's skittish which makes some difference. However as I'm making up a gang I wouldn't mind having her. But I think you told me that you wanted to dispose of two. Where is the other one?"

"Dead." . . .

"Why? how? what was the matter?" inquired Saddler. "If my memory serves me right you said that she was well only two or three days ago."

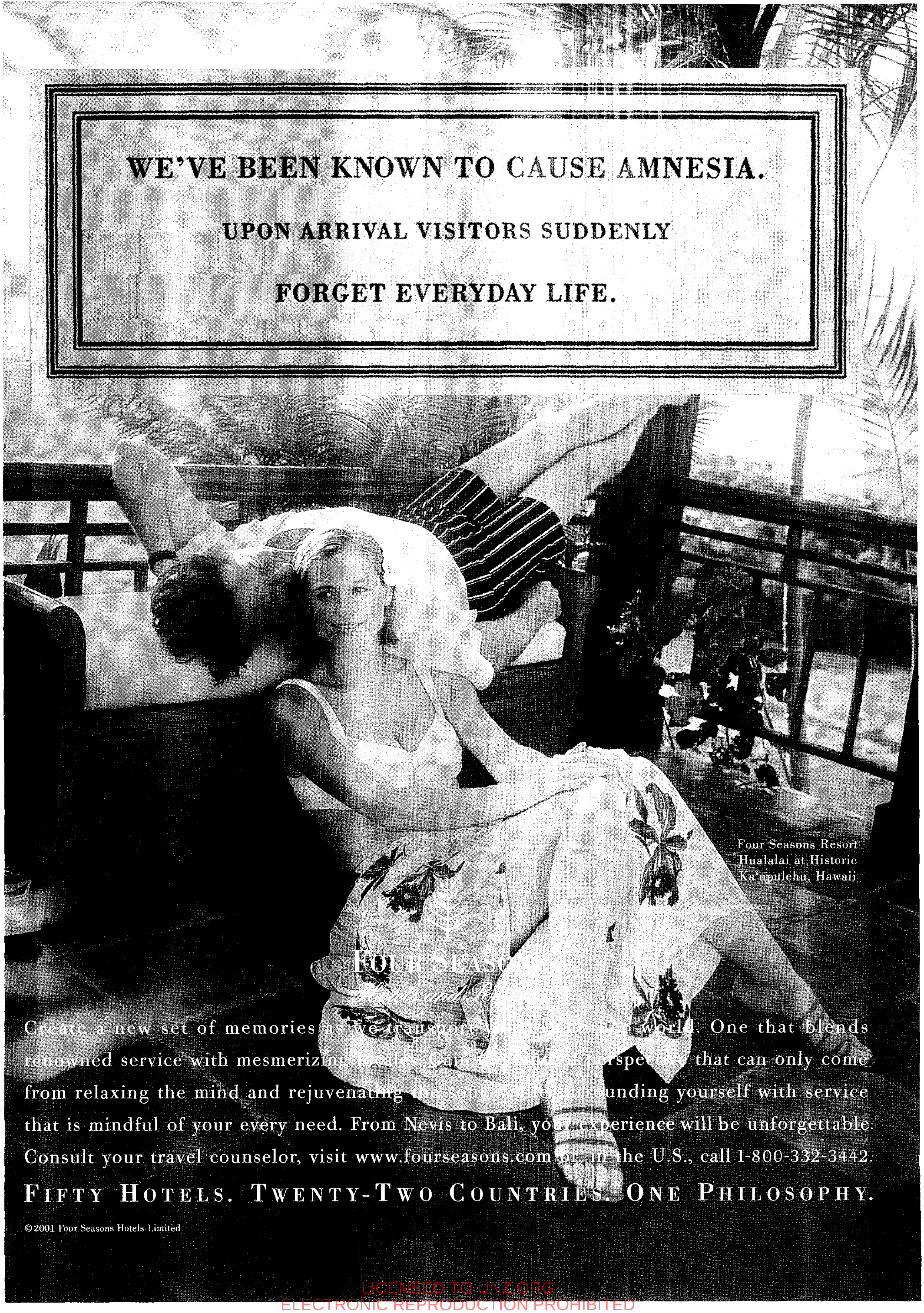
"She did not die of disease. The truth is she broke a blood vessel. I reckon it a clear loss of one or two thousand."

"How unfortunate" said Saddler. "But these wenches will die. I have sometimes thought that accidents happened to them oftener than to others. I have lost much in that way myself; probably ten thousand dollars wouldn't cover the amount. If the business in general had not been so lucrative ~~it would have~~ such things would have broke me up long ago. You see my trade is altogether in the line of good-looking wenches, and these are a deal sight worse to manage than men—every way more skittish and skeery. Then it don't do to cross them much; or if you do they'll cut up the devil, and like as anyhow break their necks, or pine themselves to skeletons. I lost six in one season and out of one company. I had orders to fill at New Orleans and all for young and beautiful women without children. Now a woman of eighteen or twenty without a child, and a slave, is not so easy to find, to say nothing of looking for fifty or a hundred." . . .

Trembling with fear I shrank back into the corner, while the gentlemen having seated themselves pursued the conversation. Mr Trappe meanwhile keeping his eye on me.

"At last I concluded" continued Saddler "to take the women with or without children, and get clear of the brats somehow, in any way that offered. But heavens, how they did carry on, and one, Louise by name, and the freshest and fairest in the gang, actually jumped into the river when she found that her child was irretrievably gone. Another one escaped and ran off to the place where she supposed her boy to have been carried. The overseer was the first to discover her, and knowing her to be a stranger, he lugged her off with the blood-hounds. They were real devils fierce, eager, and fiery—they tore her dreadfully, spoiled all her beauty, rendering her utterly unfit for my traffic; and so I sold her for a song. Now this one—what's her name?"

"Hannah." ◆



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U.S. JOURNAL

TRUE NORTH

Is a state's name giving it a bad rap?

BY MARK SINGER

BISMARCK, N.D.

"A generation from now, we'll be identified as the genuine Dakota, and South Dakota will seem like the pretender," a local businessm

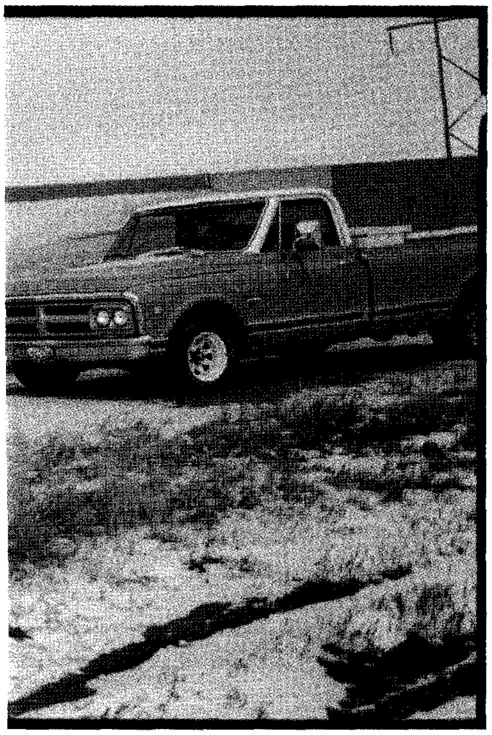
North Dakotans who favor changing the state's name tend to be realists. They readily concede that many evocative and desirable alternatives (Florida, Tahiti, Martinique) are unavailable, while certain other options (Southern Manitoba, Lower Saskatchewan) are not advisable. The name-change advocates make no attempt to be boldly original; they want to call their home Dakota, period—minus the directional modifier that was appended in 1889, when Dakota Territory (adapted from the name of the Dakota tribe, which means "alliance of friends") was divided, and North Dakota and South Dakota simultaneously joined the Union. During the deliberations that preceded statehood, sentiment ran high on both sides of the forty-sixth parallel, the anticipated border-to-be, to lay claim to the name Dakota. When neither the southern nor the northern pioneers proved willing to yield, the result was a compromise that seemed mutually unsatisfactory—but not, evidently, mutual enough. The frequency with which some North Dakotans have revisited the question across the years plainly reflects an aggrieved belief that their state came up short in the deal.

Further confirmation that members of the Dakota lobby—a loose confederacy of businesspeople, politicians, and journalists—are grounded in reality: they don't expect to prevail. Or, as some among them, hedging their skepticism, will say, "not in our lifetime." The presumed futility of the enterprise, however, is a goad rather than a deterrent. Hunkering down and trying to devise new and improved reasons that Dakota would be superior to North Dakota is a diverting pastime, an indigenous sport no less absorbing than ice fishing or curling, and it offers the deep satisfaction that comes with committing oneself to a perpetual struggle. Bucking the very long odds—trudging toward the infinite horizon with a head-bowed-into-the-stiff-wind doggedness—is, after all, the quintessential North Dakota experience.

At least four times since the end of the Second World War—in 1947, 1983, 1989, and 2001—the name-change debate has made headlines. As Mike Jacobs, the pro-Dakota editor of the Grand Forks *Herald*, noted not long ago, "For a state with very little that brings it national attention on a regular basis, this is the one thing we can do that gets people to acknowledge we're out here." Because North Dakotans are congenitally earnest, hardworking, and sincere, one naturally hesitates to impute cynical motives.

The 1947 undertaking was the imaginative handiwork of John Fleck, an automobile dealer and a member of the North Dakota House of Representatives, who, one January day, introduced a resolution postulating that "countless numbers of tourists who have not visited or even passed through North Dakota" would do so if only the place sounded less Arctic. Fleck's effort dovetailed with an editorial crusade that the Bismarck *Tribune* was then waging to do something about the local weather, an endeavor that consisted mainly of complaining about it.

It's unclear whether the peevish tone of Fleck's resolution ("Whereas, the State of North Dakota through adverse publicity has been ridiculed because of its climatic conditions; and whereas, such publicity has been unwarranted; and whereas, much of such unwarranted publicity has been caused by the use of the term 'North' in the name 'North Dakota' . . .") was responsible for its failure. In any event, it had been long forgotten by 1983, when a Bismarck advertising man named Mylo Candee spontaneously reinvented the wheel. According to Candee, who is now an aide to Kent Conrad, North Dakota's senior United States senator, he and "some poker-playing buddies" were discussing how North Dakota might improve its image and attract more industry when "I impetuously said that if the state of North Dakota wanted to change its image a good place to start was to change its name."



aid. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Soon Candee had coined a catchphrase ("Let's Drop the North and Call It Dakota"), and an outdoor-advertising company had donated billboard space in Fargo and Bismarck. Candee's logic was straightforward: "North Dakotans yearn to be known for something other than the North. It is a wintry, cold, snowy climate up here, but we wish to be recognized for some of our other attributes. In my travels, when someone asks me where I'm from, I'm in the habit of saying, 'I'm from Dakota,' and their eyes light up and they say, 'Oh, a cowboy.' But if I say the full name they talk about the cold. I liken it to Bill Cosby's character Fat Albert. Sure, he was overweight, but why rub his face in it by calling him fat?"

A Bismarck radio reporter saw the billboards and called some people in South Dakota, who rewarded him with unhappy sound bites, and from there the story made its way to the Associated Press national wire. Within hours, Candee, upon returning to his office from a funeral, discovered thirty telephone messages. He also discovered that his brain trust had scattered. ("We're still friends, but they all said, 'Don't drag my name into this!' ") The same day, he accepted an invitation to fly to New York to appear on "The CBS Morning News"—a dubious decision.

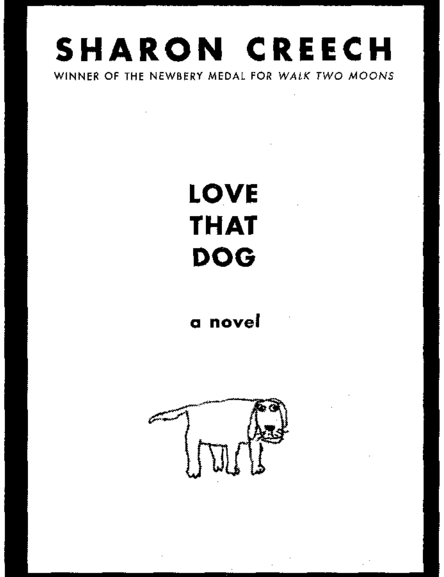
"My image of North Dakota is the Badlands, the beautiful area in the southwestern part of the state, where I grew up," Candee told me recently. "While I was on the air talking about the beauty I was accustomed to, those stinkers at CBS were running a video of a blizzard."

"Was it a blizzard in Georgia or Alabama?" I asked.

"No, it was a North Dakota blizzard, I guess. But, still, that juxtaposition bothered me."

I'd been hoping for a blizzard myself, heavy weather I could write home about, when I flew to Bismarck last month. Instead, I arrived during a thaw so startling (daytime highs *in the forties!*) that it provided fodder for every conversation I had until I got on a plane again. I timed my visit to coincide with a gathering in Grand Forks of participants in the New Economy Initiative, an ambitious industrial-development strategy-in-the-making, orchestrated by a statewide coalition of chambers of commerce, whose goals include increasing and diversifying the population, enabling businesses to become more technologically sophisticated, and creating more high-paying jobs. My first morn-

A story about how words can change your life



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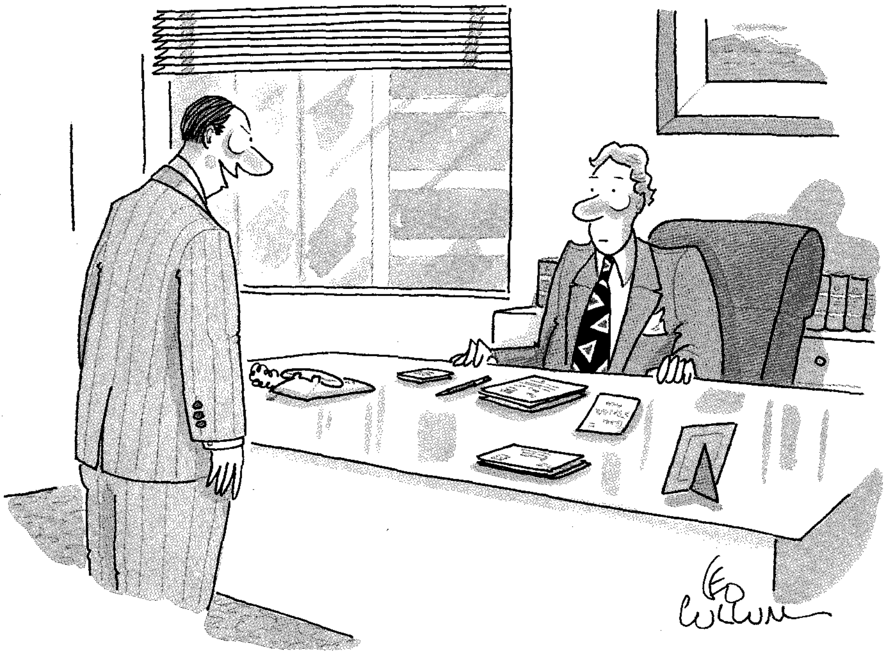

"Look around you, Crawford. I want you to savor being employed."

• •

ing in Bismarck, I had breakfast with Katherine Satrom, a travel-agency owner who is active in the New Economy Initiative's "tourism cluster." Tourism entrepreneurs, unlike, say, wheat farmers, find themselves in the hypothetically enviable position of having nowhere to go but up; North Dakota ranks forty-ninth in tourism revenues (ahead of Delaware).

"They encouraged us to think outside the box," Satrom told me, by way of explaining what prompted her, a year ago, to proffer a "Let's Call Our State Dakota!" initiative. "I prefer to think of this as shortening the state's name rather than changing it. Not everyone's comfortable with change." Satrom, a solicitous and friendly woman in her middle years and a lifelong North Dakota resident, was aware of the John Fleck and Mylo Candee precedents. "Just because an idea fails once or twice doesn't mean it isn't worthy of perseverance," she said. Nor was she discouraged by the cautionary experience of Tim Mathern, a state senator from Fargo who in 1989 drafted two name-change resolutions, held hearings before the legislature's constitutional revisions committee, and had the majority of the committee members in his corner, only to see the full Senate trounce the idea. Mathern felt that embracing Dakota would have been a way of honoring Native Americans, and Satrom agreed. "What could be more true to our heritage?" she said.

But there was a tentativeness in her tone, a media-shyness that I attributed to the repercussions last spring when her proposal received a premature public airing. The immediate consequences were the usual get-a-load-of-this stories in the national press, late-night-TV monologue jokes, and a flood of you'd-*better*-not-change-the-name-of-my-home-state letters to the editor, many from expatriates in California, Arizona, Colorado, and other un-North Dakota latitudes. Dave Barry wrote a column ("Changing names is a sound idea, an idea based on the scientific principle that underlies the field of marketing, which is: People are stupid"), the mayor of Grand Forks retaliated by inviting him to come for a visit and promising to name a sewage lift station in his honor, and Barry wrote a second column ("North Dakota is calling me. 'Come on up!' it says. And then it adds: 'Bring thermal underwear!' ").

Satrom had thoughtfully arranged for me a two-day itinerary that seemed designed to curb any inclination I might have had to caricature the state as a flatter-than-flat treeless prairie. (Typical flatness knee-slapper: "North Dakota is so flat you can watch your dog run away for three days.") My guide the first day was Jim Fuglie, a lapsed journalist and former director of the state tourism department who now works for an advertising firm. Fuglie's pro-Dakota credentials include testimony before Senator Mathern's committee. He also made a name for himself, during the nineteen-eighties, as the author of what could best be described as a campaign of government-sanctioned ironic boosterism, when he posted billboards at the borders with messages like "Welcome to North Dakota—Mountain Removal Project Completed" and "Stay in North Dakota—Custer Was Healthy When He Left."

We hit the road right after breakfast, crossed the Missouri River, and drove west a couple of hundred miles. Along the way, the elevation subtly rose and the terrain shifted from plowed wheat fields to short-grass rangeland. The air temperature also rose—a local phenomenon. Typically, Bismarck, in the center of the state, is five degrees warmer than Fargo, on the Minnesota border, and Dickinson, sixty miles from Montana, is five degrees warmer yet. "That's why this part of North Dakota's called the Banana Belt," Fuglie said. By the end of the day, I'd had a good look at the Badlands, an expanse of buttes and ravines carved more than half a million years ago by the Little Missouri River, and covering thousands of square miles—a vista more majestic, it occurred to me, than several lifetimes' worth of truck commercials. I'd also met some rancher friends of Fuglie's, mingled with a herd of bison who hospitably refrained from charging us, and visited Medora, a restored Western town situated at the entrance to Theodore Roosevelt National Park, which draws four hundred and fifty thousand visitors a year.

Fuglie told me that, by coincidence, shortly before Katherine Satrom decided to champion the Dakota idea, he'd been having discussions with executives at a software company called Great Plains, whose president, Doug Burgum, was willing to underwrite market testing of the name change. For several years, Great Plains has been North Dakota's most conspicuously successful entrepreneurial venture; last spring, in a $1.1-billion stock deal, it was acquired by Microsoft and renamed Microsoft Great Plains. Burgum, a homeboy and happy philanthropist, sees the Dakota opportunity as, in effect, a product-placement scheme on a grand scale, a way of rebranding the entire state.

"What people like Doug Burgum and I are interested in is the message that we're willing to change the name of our state just to survive in this century," Fuglie said. "If this actually happened, it would be a signal to the world that something powerful has taken place. That's how I think we could sell this. You know, there's a lot of identity confusion between North Dakota and South Dakota. People who aren't from here don't know which is which. They say, 'The Badlands. Oh, those are in South Dakota.' So we just haven't marketed our Badlands as well as they have. If we could change our name, a generation from now we'll be identified as the genuine Dakota, and South Dakota will seem like the pretender. Our research shows that it would be the same thing as Virginia versus West Virginia. Where would you rather say you're from?"

The next day, I rode from Bismarck to Grand Forks, completing a traverse of the state, in the genial company of Katherine Satrom's husband, Joe, who works for Ducks Unlimited, a conservation organization that protects ducks so that folks wearing camouflage gear and carrying shotguns can wait for them to fly by. We stuck to back roads, and I got to contemplate the prairie pothole region, a forty-to-sixty-mile-wide band of elevated glacial remnant, pocked with thousands of small ponds that make North Dakota the home of the finest waterfowl-nesting habitat on the continent. The day after that, I sat down for a conversation with Doug Burgum in his office at the Microsoft Great Plains headquarters, a cedar-glass-and-brick low-rise campus on an interstate frontage road in Fargo. Burgum, who is forty-five, grew up thirty miles from Fargo, in the tiny town of Arthur, where the grain elevator has been owned by his family for four generations. After college, at North Dakota State University, he did what most of his contemporaries did—left the state. (North Dakota high-school students

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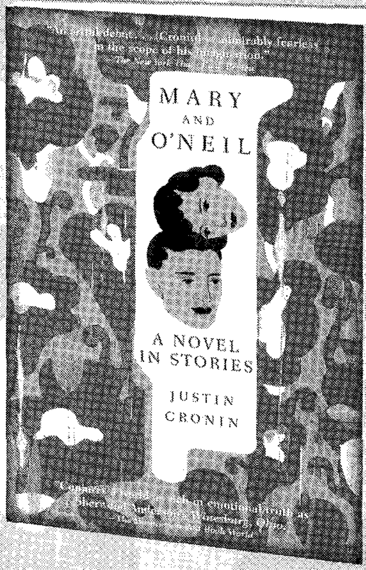

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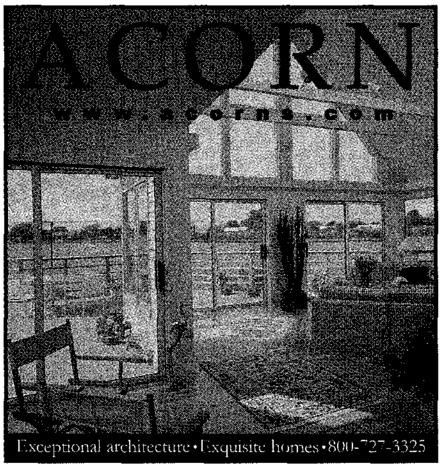

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are, by a wide statistical margin, more likely to attend college than high-school students in any other state. But this salutary fact is offset by a grievous migration of the state's youngest and brightest. Fifteen of its fifty-three counties have fewer than twenty new births annually. The population in the 2000 census was six hundred and forty-two thousand, forty thousand less than in 1930.)

In 1983, Burgum was living in Chicago and working as a management consultant at McKinsey & Company. He joined Great Plains, a developer of software for small and medium-sized businesses, when it was a startup, "because I was specifically interested in doing something in North Dakota." After mortgaging farmland that he inherited from his father, Burgum literally "bet the farm" by providing the seed capital for the fledgling company. A year later, together with other members of his extended family, he bought the rest of the company.

North Dakota, Burgum said, has coal reserves, plenty of water, and roughly the same latitude as the Ruhr Valley, in Germany. "But there's no industrial base here," he said. "That's not the result of a lack of resources; it's a function of the distance to markets." The state leads the world in the production of durum wheat, for pasta, but when Burgum was in high school a bushel of durum sold for seven dollars, and now it's less than half that price. "When your economy is so tied to agriculture, you're dependent not just on the weather but, increasingly nowadays, on global market forces. There's so much you can't control."

That sense of being marginalized, of struggling to master one's destiny, has a long history. It's a syndrome traceable to the settlement of Dakota Territory, which was an economic-development scheme hatched by the railroad interests. The railroads built an infrastructure for millions of people—a town every twenty miles—only a small fraction of whom showed up. For decades, of course, the towns have been dying or barely hanging on. "On top of that," Burgum continued, "we have this deep-seated Scandinavian, Teutonic outlook—a combination of dark Lutheranism and German Catholicism, which adds up to a primal sense that somehow we're not worthy. This is also a place where people get the message that if they do well they're not supposed to say anything about it, because it's not nice. You never want to do well at the expense of anyone else. The grocer in a small town wants to look like he's broke so nobody thinks he's charging too much.

"When we convened focus groups in Fargo and Bismarck last summer, we found that most people don't care for the idea of changing the name. They don't want to be made fun of, they don't want to have to explain it to their out-of-state relatives, so they talk about what it's going to cost. But math doesn't speak to the heart of the issue.

"Words are powerful, names are powerful. The word 'north,' for instance—unless you're a polar explorer, there's nothing that excites the mind about the word. Some people think it's intellectually dishonest of us to drop the 'North.' But we're north only in relative terms. We're north of South Dakota, but we're not north of Winnipeg or several major European countries. The geographical center of North America is in Rugby, North Dakota. But people look at weather maps that don't show Canada, and in the American mind-set we're thought of as the end of the road.

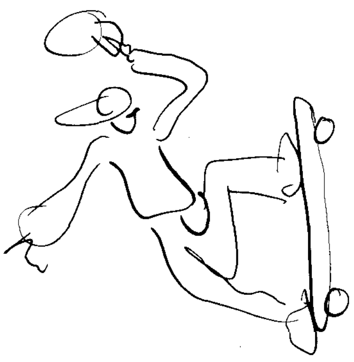
"No state has ever changed its name. It appeals to me for that reason alone—that it's never been done before. One definition of an adventure is an uncertain outcome. Why not just do it for ourselves?"

Following my chat with Burgum, I hurried up the interstate to Grand Forks, where, as it happened, back-to-back events were taking place that clearly fell into the doing-it-for-ourselves category. At the Alerus Center, a city-owned convention facility, the New Economy Initiative was holding its winter meeting. This was to be followed by the Marketplace of Ideas, an annual business-opportunity and employment-networking bazaar, organized by Senator Conrad and the state agriculture commissioner. I arrived at the Alerus Center in time for a PowerPoint presentation on "nature-based tourism" led by a woman who made the perhaps not scientifically provable observation that businesses that cater to bird-watchers have a lot of growth potential because "many birders live in warm places, and they look forward to coming to North Dakota for a few days and being cold." I liked that—the cheerful, benign self-delusion that it implied—because I had also come to realize that North Dakotans generally know better than to fool themselves or anyone else. More than once, my hosts mentioned what a lucky break it was for North Dakota that the National Weather Service had recently recalibrated the wind-chill index. What used to feel like thirty-five below now feels, officially, like a mere fifteen below. No telling what a boon that might be to the economy.

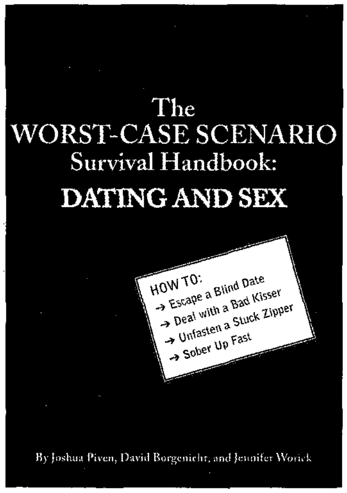
The next afternoon, back at the Alerus Center, I made a point of touring the arena where the Marketplace of Ideas exhibitors had set out brochures and samples of their wares. There were a couple of hundred booths, occupied by promoters of products and enterprises large and small: monster windmills ("North Dakota: the Saudi Arabia of wind energy"); flax producers ("Flaxseed: almost too good to be true"); the revolutionary bidirectional Dakota Sno-Blade. Elsewhere in the building, throughout the day, citizens treated themselves to dozens of seminars with titles like "Profit by Welcoming Vacation Guests to Your Farm," "Emus—Status of the Industry Today," and "Grant Writing: Where Is the Money? How Do We Get It?"

Tantalizing possibilities, but I hadn't quite made up my mind to relocate permanently. If I did, I knew that finding work wouldn't be a problem. "Jobs are so plentiful in North Dakota," I'd been told, "most people have two." And yet, for all their self-deprecating affability, North Dakotans have a canny suspicion of certain types of outsiders. Yes, the state could really use more people, more investment capital, brighter entrepreneurial ideas. At the same time, its citizens prefer, in many ways, to be left alone. A grave distrust of corporations—a lesson learned from the experience with the railroad builders—is explicitly encoded in state law. (It is still illegal, for example, for big corporations to own farmland.) The progressive Nonpartisan League, which thrived during the years of the First World War, was created in response to dissatisfaction with the major national political parties, and it established an enduring tone for political debate. Two of its vestiges are the Bank of North Dakota, in Bismarck, which was founded in 1919, the only state-owned bank in the country, and a state-owned mill, which was built in Grand Forks, in the early twenties, in response to the predatory ways of the Minneapolis grain-processing oligopolists. A great deal of native pride is invested in these curiosities, each, in its way, a declaration of independence from the mainstream way of doing business. Increasingly, that pride mingles with a recognition of the discomfort of marginality. Which is not to say that the prospect of change seems either desirable or inevitable. At the Alerus Center, I had a conversation with Lloyd Omdahl, a retired political-science professor and former lieutenant governor, who was bragging, tongue in cheek, about his home town of Conway. According to the 2000 census, Conway had suffered a net loss of only one person since 1990. "We went from 24 to 23," Omdahl said. "We feel it's a victory compared to other communities. My theory is that the young people aren't leaving—the old people are dying."

The wind blows, winter overstays its welcome, most experiences are horizontal, and that's the beauty of the place. A new idea comes along, and nobody's really sure what to do with it. Same with old ideas. North Dakotans possess a sublime talent for talking to the brink of death just about any subject that pertains to North Dakota—because the rest of the world isn't much interested, and there aren't that many North Dakotans to debate the topic. Eventually, it feels so old that they reach a consensus to forget about it. After a few long winters of hibernation, the time arrives for it to resurface. When it does, it's a brand-new idea all over again. ◆



LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD



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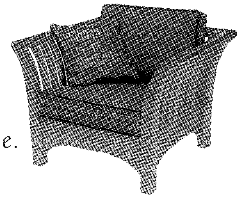

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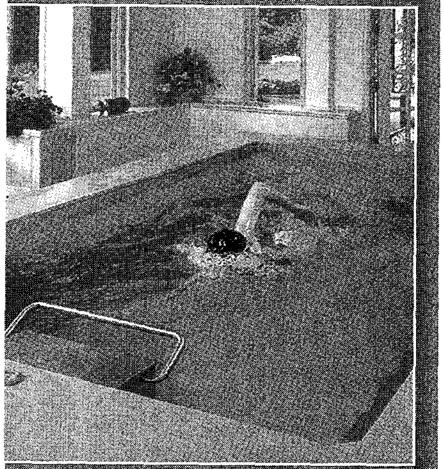

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NEW YORK JOURNAL

A PURIM STORY

The funny thing about being Jewish.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

I suppose it is a sign of just how poor a Jew I am that when I got a letter from the Jewish Museum last February asking me to be the Purimspieler at its Purim Ball I thought there must be some kind of mistake. I don't mean that I thought there must be some mistake in asking me. I am enough of a ham that I would not be surprised if a Hindu congregation asked me to come forward and recite choice selections from the Bhagavad Gita. I mean that I was surprised because I thought the Jewish Museum was making a mistake about the date of Purim.

"Isn't that the one in the fall?" I asked my wife, Martha. "With the hamantaschen? And the little hut in the back yard?"

"No," she said. "No, it isn't. They have hamantaschen all year round. Even I know that."

"The thing that puzzles me," I went on, holding up the letter and reading it again, "is how they ever figured out I was Jewish."

She executed what I believe our fathers would have called a spit take. "That is the most ridiculous question I've ever heard. There's your name, for one thing, and then the way you use Jewish words in writing."

"What Jewish words have I ever used in writing?"

She thought for a moment. "Well, 'shvitz.' And 'inchoate.' "

" 'Inchoate' is not a Jewish word."

"It is the way you use it. You've got 'Jew' written all over you. It's obvious."

"It's obvious," my six-year-old son, Luke, echoed, looking up from his plate. "It's obvious." I was startled, though not entirely. We lived in Paris for the first five years of his life, and ethnic awareness is one of the first things he's been exposed to on coming home to New York. The lame and the halt, the meaning of Kwanzaa and the nights of Hanukkah—all the varieties of oppressed ethnic experience have become the material of his education. He sees the world in groups, or is beginning to. His best friend, Jacob Kogan, has a sister who was asked by her grandparents what she wanted for Hanukkah. "A Christmas tree," she said. Luke reported that with pleasure. He and Jacob have developed a nice line in old, Henny Youngman-style jokes, which apparently circulate permanently in the lower grades of New York schools, like Mercury space-program debris circulating in outer space, getting lower and lower in its orbit each year: "Waiter, what's this fly doing in my soup!" "The backstroke."

I gave him a look. His birth was the occasion of my realizing just how poor a Jew I am. When he was born, at Mount Sinai hospital, in New York, almost every other baby in the nursery had Lubavitcher parents, and in the isolette they had proudly placed a little framed photograph of the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, so that the first thing the baby saw was the thin Russian eyes and the great Rembrandt beard of the Rebbe. The Hasidic fathers clustered around the glass of the nursery, and I felt at once drawn to them and inadequate to their dark-suited, ringleted assurance. They looked wonderful, and I, another member of the tribe, wanted, at least provisionally, to attach myself to them.

"He's crying from the circumcision," I explained to the father on my left, significantly.

He stared at me, and, with the hat and fringe, he looked at first very old and then, as my eye saw past the costume, very young. "He's been circumcised already?" he said. I hadn't known you were supposed to wait.

Still, he grasped the gesture toward commonality. "What's his name?"

"Luke," I said proudly. "Luke Auden."

He backed away from me, really backed away, like a Japanese extra in a Godzilla movie when the monster comes into view, looming up above the power pylons.

I returned to the letter. It was a very nice, warm letter, from the director of the museum, explaining that the "event takes the form of a masked ball in celebration of the Purim holiday, with approximately seven hundred guests gathered for a black-tie dinner-dance at the Waldorf-Astoria." The "highlight" was a "10-15 minute original Purimspiel—a humorous retelling of the story of Purim, Queen Esther's rescue of the Jews in ancient Persia." In a postscript, the director promised "to send some background information on the Biblical story of Purim."

Looking at the letter again, I began to realize that the Purimspieler barrel must have been thoroughly scraped before the museum people got to me, and also that, getting to me, they knew what they were getting. They had been able to deduce that, though Jewish, I was sufficiently ignorant about Jewishness to need "some background information on the Biblical story of Purim." If they had been asking me to talk on life in France, I doubted that they would have thought to send me a map of Paris.

"Daddy, did I tell you the new version?" Luke said, suddenly.

"Which new version?"

"Man goes into a restaurant, he says, 'Waiter, waiter.' "

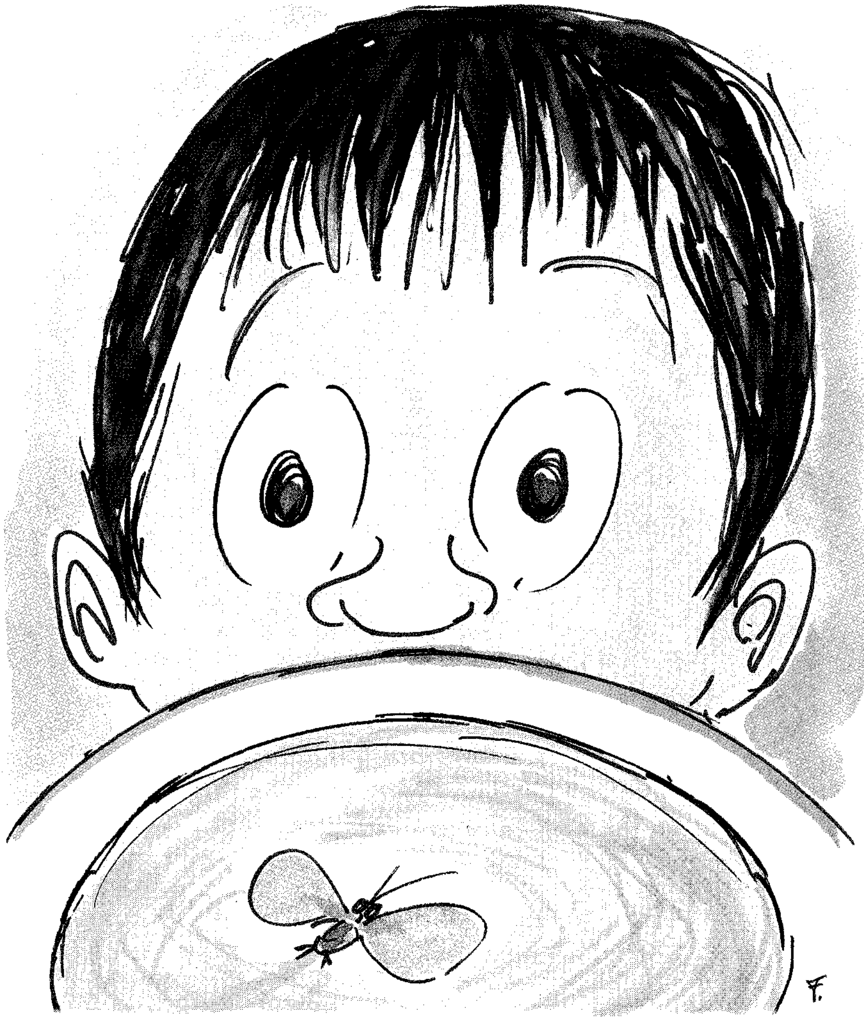
"No," I corrected him. "He should just say, 'Waiter!' It's the guy who goes to see a doctor who says it twice: 'Doctor, doctor!' Just 'Waiter!' " What a thing, to be a pedant of one-liners.

"Oh. He says, 'Waiter, what's this fly doing in my soup?,' and the waiter, then the waiter says, 'There was no room left in the potato salad.' "

I laughed. "Of course I'm going to do it," I said.

"Is this going to be one of those things where you end up still skeptical but strangely exhilarated by the faith of your fathers?" Martha said. "Because if it is, I don't want you to do it. It's hard enough having you around morose all the time. It would be even worse if you were strangely exhilarated."

The next morning, a Saturday, I took down the Book of Esther from the shelf—or, more precisely, I took down the old King James Bible, the only one I owned. It has all the words of Jesus picked out in red, as though highlighted by an earnest Galileean undergraduate. I was in charge of the kids, but I felt sure that I would have time to read. Luke was shut in the bedroom, watching Saturday-morning cartoons, struggling desperately to understand; I knew he would interrupt only occasionally, seeking clarification on some cartoon convention. Because of his time in Paris, he missed a lot of cartoon-watching, and now he is frantically trying to catch up. He gets a worried look on his face as he runs into the room and asks about what he has just seen: "Why when people go through walls in a cartoon do they leave holes exactly the same shape as them?" "Why when someone touches electricity in a cartoon do you see his whole skeleton? But only for a second?" The rules of an alternative universe, what there is to laugh at and what is just part of life, remain mysterious.



The fly in the soup was an essentially Jewish joke; I was in the middle of another.

JULES FEIFFER

Meanwhile, the baby, Olivia, was happily occupied at the window, dog-spotting. "Dog! Dog!" came the occasional shout. Breakfast and dinner, she will not stay in her high chair but insists on scanning the skies, or streets, like a scientist in a fifties sci-fi movie, searching for life forms she has identified as alien. She is endlessly excited, and wildly agitated whenever she spots one, which, given the density of dogs on Upper East Side streets, she does, predictably, twice a minute.

"Good girl," I said absently, and went back to my Bible. The story of Purim, I learned, takes place in Persia, and mostly in the court of King Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus, who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia, has a wife, Vashti, who has a "banquet for the women" and then refuses to come when the King commands. The King overreacts, and his advisers tell him to divorce the queen and hold a beauty contest to choose a new one, which he does. He chooses a Jewish girl named Esther. Esther's cousin, an ambitious fellow named Mordecai, then saves the King's life by exposing a plot against him. But the King gets bored with Esther, and meanwhile his chief councillor, Haman, decides to start a pogrom against the Jews, for all the usual reasons: they are tight and clannish, and obey only themselves. He gets the King's approval, and Mordecai, hearing of the plan, goes out in sackcloth and ashes to protest. He tells Esther that she ought to protest, too, and she says, "Well, what can I do?" "Do something," he tells her. She gets dressed up in her best clothes and goes to the King, and the King, thinking she looks nifty, listens to her. He suddenly learns how Mordecai saved his life, and orders Haman to be hanged on the scaffold he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the Jews, about to be pogromed, massacre Haman's followers, including all ten of Haman's sons, who are hanged or, depending on the translation, impaled on stakes. Then everybody celebrates.

I stopped reading. Send this up? I couldn't even grasp it. I knew that the thing to get was Esther's rescue of the Jews, but that seemed almost incidental to this general story of competitive massacre and counter-massacre and bride-shopping. The trouble, I realized, was not that I did not know how to read in the text but that I did not know, had never been taught, how to read past it. Like Luke with the electrified cat, I did not know what was significant and what was merely conventional—I did not know what were the impaling practices of ancient Near East culture, and what was, so to speak, the specifically Jewish point. Although all our official, school training in reading is in reading in—in reading deeply, penetrating the superficial and the apparent to get to the obscure and hidden—in truth a lot of the skill in reading classics lies in reading past them. The obsession with genetic legitimacy and virginity in Shakespeare; the acceptance of torture in Dante—these are not subjects to be absorbed but things you glide by on your way to the poetry. You have to feel confident saying, "Oh, that's just then"—with the crucial parallel understanding that now will be then, too, that our progeny will have to learn to read past sentences like "After the peace demonstration, they stopped at Joe's for veal scallopini," or, perhaps, "In their joy, they conceived their fifth child," or even, "They immunized the children." Obviously, it was necessary to read past the impaling of Haman's sons, the ethnic pogroms, to some larger purpose—otherwise there would not be Purimspiels and happy Purim balls—but I did not know how to do it. I saw impaled Iranians where I needed to see a fly doing the backstroke in the soup.

I walked over to the baby at the window seat. Out the window, in the near distance, we could see a synagogue. Even now, I thought, in there people were being taught to read past the scaffold. "Dog, dog!" the baby cried, as a dog-walker came up the street, six or seven dogs on leashes held in one hand. She began to cry out in delight. So many dogs! I closed the book, and hoped glumly that a spiel, that whole leashfuls of them, would come before Purim did.

The next day, I decided to return to the only Jewish tradition with which I was at all confident, and that was having smoked fish at eleven o'clock on Sunday mornings. Every Sunday morning throughout my childhood, my grandfather would arrive with the spread—salty lox and unctuous sable and dry whitefish and sweet pickled salmon. Sometimes he took me with him to shop, and he always had a pained, resigned look as he ordered: "Yeah, I guess . . . give me some of the whitefish." But when he got home he would be pleased. ("He has very nice stuff, Irving," he would say to my father.) For Purimspiel purposes, I thought, I had better get into Jew training, and eat as my fathers had.

Every Sunday morning for the next few weeks, Luke and I went together to Sable's, the extraordinary smoked-fish and appetizer store at Second Avenue and Seventy-eighth Street. Sable's is the only place in my neighborhood where my grandfather would have been entirely comfortable—with the hand-lettered signs and the Dr. Brown's and the mingled smell of pickles and herring—and yet it is owned and staffed by Asians who once worked as nova slicers at Zabar's, on the West Side, and who walked out to claim their freedom. (I imagined them wandering, in their aprons, through Central Park for years before arriving at the promised land.) They sell Jewish food, and with the same bullying, ironic Jewish manner that I recalled from my childhood trips with my grandfather, but they do it as a thing learned.

"They got nice stuff, anyway, Irving," I said to Luke as we walked over.

"Why are you calling me Irving?" he asked.

"My grandfather always called me Irving when he took me shopping for smoked fish. He had me confused with Grandpop, I guess."

"Oh. Is Grandpop's name Irving?"

"No," I said. "His name isn't actually Irving, either. But your great-grandfather could never remember what his name really was, so he called him Ir-

MARRIAGE

My husband likes to watch the cooking shows, the building shows,
the Discovery Channel, and the surgery channel.
Last night, he told us about a man who came into the emergency room

with a bayonet stuck entirely through his skull and brain.
Did they get it out? we all asked.
They did. And the man was O.K. because the blade went exactly between

the two halves without severing them.
And who had shoved this bayonet into the man's head? His wife.
A strong woman, someone said. And everyone else agreed.

—*Marie Howe*

ving. I think he thought all small Jewish boys should be called Irving."

Luke wasn't interested. "Oh," he said. I could see he was looking inward. Then, in a rush: "Why in cartoons when someone touches electricity, after you see their whole skeleton for a second, then they go all stiff and straight up in the air and then their whole body turns black and then it turns into dust and then it crumbles while they still look out and smile as if they were feeling sick? Why?"

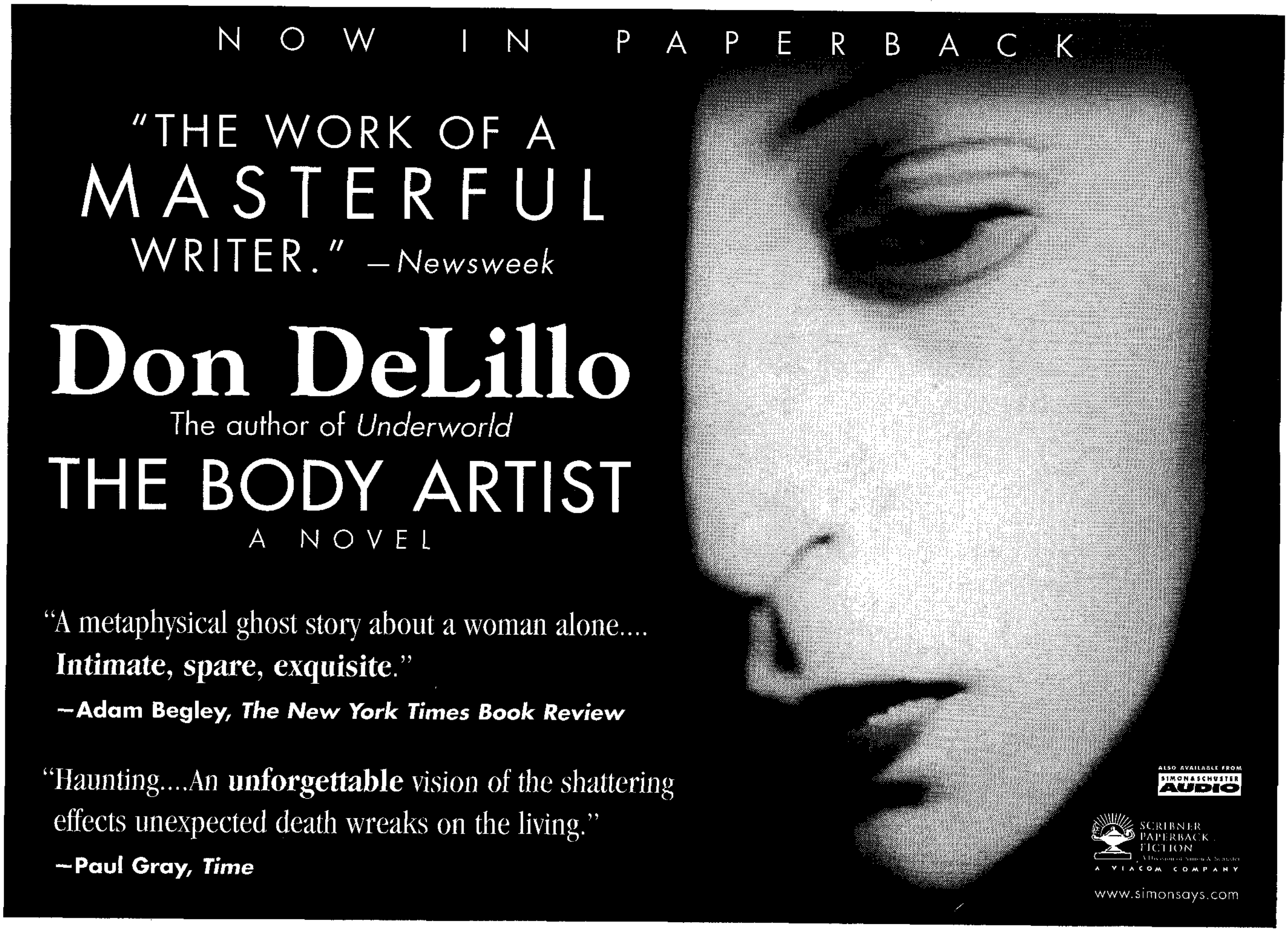
I said it was just a convention, just the way cartoons are, and was meant to be funny.

"Why is it funny?" he asked.

We walked on in silence.

Later that day, I sat down with a piece of paper. I had one mildly derivative comic idea, which was to adapt the Purim story to contemporary New York. Ahasuerus was Donald Trump: dumb as an ox, rich, lecherous, easily put out, and living in a gaudy apartment. So Vashti must be Ivana—that was easy—and Esther was a Russian Jewish model who had immigrated from Odessa, a beauty, but hardly aware that she was Jewish save for the convenience of immigration. Haman—what if you said that Haman . . . But I couldn't focus. How was it, I wondered, that I could know nothing of all this? For the truth is that Jew *is* written all over me. If on my father's side they were in wholesale food, on my mother's side they were dark-skinned Sephardim who had stayed in Palestine—so busy squabbling that they actually missed the bus for the Diaspora. One of my maternal great-grandfathers, family lore has it, was the rabbi sent from Hebron to Lisbon at the end of the nineteenth century to call the Jews out of hiding and back into the synagogue.

And yet, when I think about my own upbringing, the best I can say is that the most entirely Jewish thing about us was the intensity with which we celebrated Christmas: passionately, excessively, with the tallest tree and the most elaborately wrapped presents. Coming of age in the fifties, my parents, like so many young intellectuals of their generation, distanced themselves from the past as an act of deliberate emancipation. My parents were not so much in rebellion against their own past as they were in love with the idea of using the values unconsciously taken from that culture to conquer another—they went from Jewish high school to Ivy League college and fell in love with English literature. Like so many others, they ended in that queer, thriving country of the Jewish American possessor of the Christian literary heritage: they became Zionists of eighteenth-century literature, kibbutzniks of metaphysical poetry. The only Bible-related book I can recall from my childhood was in my father's office, an academic volume called "The Bible to Be Read as Literature"; the joke was, of course, that in those precincts it was literature that was to be read as the Bible. (We didn't have a Christian Christmas; we had a Dickensian Christmas.) The eradication left an imprint stronger than indoctrination could have. We had "Jew"



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written all over us in the form of marks from the eraser.

What was left of overt, nameable Jewishness was the most elemental Jewish thing, and that was a style of joking. My grandfather, who ran a small grocery store in a black neighborhood, lives in my memory, apart from Sunday-morning fish, mostly in his jokes, a round of one-liners as predictable as the hands on a clock, and yet, weirdly, getting funnier by the year: "Joe Banana and his bunch? The music with appeal." And "I used to be a boxer. In a shoe store." And "I used to sing tenor—but they traded me in for two fives." And "Feel stiff in the joints? Then stay out of the joints."

The first time I had a sense of Jewishness as a desirable state rather than as background radiation, humming in a Christian cosmos, was when I was thirteen and, turned on to the idea of New York, saw that it was made up of Jewish comedians—of jokes. I discovered the Marx Brothers and then Woody Allen. I bought a book of old comics' routines and learned the telephone spiels of Georgie Jessel. ("Mom, why did you cook that bird? He was a valuable bird; he could speak six languages!" "Oh . . . he shoulda said something.") "The Ed Sullivan Show" fascinated me: Corbett Monica and Norm Crosby and Jackie Vernon, and, hovering above even them, Myron Cohen, the mournful storyteller, and Henny Youngman, genuinely the funniest man, who looked exactly like my grandfather, to boot. The greatest generation. I read interviews with obscure Jewish comedians, old and young—really obscure ones, Ed Bluestone and Ben Blue—and noticed, with a rising thrill, that none of them talked about "jokes" that you "told." Instead, they talked about "bits," which they "did"—and killed "them" doing them. That, for me, explained everything, life and art: life was stuff that happened, art was bits you did. It was the first religion that had ever made sense.

I came to New York to practice that faith, do bits, be a Purimspieler—only to find that that world was gone. Some time in the decade after my arrival, the Jewish comic culture dried up. The sense, so strong since the beginning of the century, that New York was naturally Jewish and, by an unforced corollary, naturally funny had gone. Of course, there were standup comics, many of them Jewish, but the particular uneasiness, the sense that talking too fast might keep you alive, the sense that you talked as a drowning man might wave his hands, the whining, high-pitched tone and the "r"-less accent—that had gone. Paul Reiser, Jerry Seinfeld, much as I enjoyed and even identified with them, were as settled and as American as Bob and Ray or Will Rogers. This was an event with a specific date, marked in the work of the last great New York Jew comedian. Between 1977 and "Annie Hall," where being a Jewish comedian is a slightly weary and depressing obligation, to be rebelled against, and "Broadway Danny Rose," just seven years later, when the black-and-white world of the comics shpritzing at the Carnegie Deli is frankly presented as a Chagall world, a folktale setting, the whole thing vanished. Even Jackie Mason, a rabbi in training and ostensibly a master of the style, was quite different; his subject, when, in the eighties, he returned from obscurity, wasn't the unsuspected power of being a loser but the loss of power in the face of all those new immigrants.

New York Jewish comic manners were still around, only they were no longer practiced by Jews, or were practiced by Jews as something learned rather than as something felt. What had replaced the organic culture of Jewish comedy in New York was a permanent pantomime of Jewish manners. The fly doing the backstroke in the soup was part of a kind of chicken-soup synchronized-swimming event, as ordered and regulated as an Olympic sport: Jewish New York manners were a thing anyone could imitate in order to indicate "comedy."

One sensed this at Sable's, where Jewish traditions of shpritzing were carried on by non-Jews, and in television commercials, where New York taxi-drivers were still represented as wise guys, even though they had not been for a generation or more. But it was true in subtler ways, too. On "Seinfeld," which I had missed while living abroad but now could watch in reruns every night, everything is, at one level, shockingly Jewish, far more than Sid Caesar or Mel Brooks was ever allowed to be, with mohels and brisses and whining fathers who wait all week for their copy of *TV Guide*—but the unstated condition is that there be absolutely no mention of the "J" word, while the most Jewish character, George, is given an Italian last name, Costanza. This is not because Jewishness is forbidden but because it is so obvious. Jewishness is to "Seinfeld" what the violin was to Henny Youngman—the prop that you used between jokes, as much for continuity as for comedy. The Jewish situations are mimed by rote, while the real energy of the jokes lies in the observation of secular middle-class manners. In the old Jewish comedies, it had been just the opposite: the manners of the middle class were mimed by rote—the suits and ties, the altered names, Jack Benny's wife called Mary—while the energy of the jokes lay in the hidden Jewishness. (The comedy of Phil Silvers's great Sgt. Bilko almost scandalously derives from the one thing that no one on the show is allowed to mention, which is that Bilko is a clever New York Jew dominating a kind of all-star collection of dim Gentiles.) New York Jewishness was now the conscious setup rather than the hidden punch line.

One Sunday morning, Luke and I walked over to Sable's and bought even more than usual; we were having company. But the cashier was unimpressed. He looked over our order.

"How many people you having?" he asked.

"Eight."

"From out of town?"

"Yes."

He sighed. "Me, I would be ashamed to put this on the table."

"You would?"

He looked at the ritualized bits of cured sable and salmon, and shrugged again—my grandfather to the life!

"This is not worth putting on the table. I would be ashamed."

"What do you think I should do?"

"Get a pound of herring salad. Pound of whitefish salad. Pound of bluefish salad."

I did. "Now I proud to put this on the table," he said. "Now I no longer ashamed for you."

He had learned to do it at Zabar's, I realized as I left—the permanent pantomime of Jewish manners with wings on! Though it cost me nearly a hundred dollars, it was worth it for the lesson.

The combination of an Asian sense of face with a Jewish sense of guilt may be the most powerful commercial hybrid in history.

“So, see, I have an Esther in my family, too. The matriarch of my family. She dominated her sisters, in a grasping way, and then came to die of emphysema in my grandparents’ apartment in Florida. We went to see her in, this is in about 1993, I guess. Wheezing and pained, she said, ‘People tell me you are doing well, but I lie here in bed at night and worry, oh, I worry about you. How I worry. So now tell me, tell me, so your aunt won’t lie here as she is dying and worry . . . tell me . . . how much are you really making?’ ”

“You can’t possibly tell that story,” Martha said. “It’s anti-Semitic.”

“It’s true,” I said.

“Of course it’s true,” Martha said. “It’s just not appropriate.”

I was trying out possible spiels on the more Jewish of our many Jewish friends. We have a certain number of friends who, though coming from backgrounds not unlike my own, have recommitted themselves to Jewishness in a serious way. While Yiddishkeit as a practice had nearly disappeared from New York, one of the things that were replacing it, paradoxically, was Judaism. A number of our friends are what I have come to think of as X-treme Jews, who study Cabala or glory in the details of the lives of Jewish gangsters, and even like to call themselves “Hebes,” in the manner of young black men calling each other “niggas.”

I envied my friends the seeming clarity of their Jewishness, just as I envied, a little, the clarity of the family of observant Jews who live down the hall from us. On warm Friday evenings, one or two of the adolescent boys in that family will come knocking at our door, galumphing in heavy shoes and with pale faces, and, looking woeful, say, “Could you come and turn on the air-conditioner in our apartment? We can’t, ’cause we’re Jews.” I admired the simplicity of their self-definition: “We can’t, ’cause we’re Jews.” We are unashamed of our essence, even as it makes us sweat.

But, whatever the appeal of that plain faith, I can’t say I was inclined to follow them. It seemed to me that my contemporaries, in contrast to the boys down the hall, had chosen Jewish—they were majoring in Jewish, just as my father had majored in English—when the force of the tradition was that it was not elective. I decided to sit down and read what I imagined was the bible on the subject, Alfred Kazin’s memoir “New York Jew,” a book that, over the years, I had neither read in nor read past but simply not read, thinking, unforgivably, that I already knew its contents. (The forties, boy! The fifties, joy! The sixties, oy!) In fact, it’s an unpredictable, rhapsodic, uncontentious book—but, for all the starkness of its title, its premise is that Jewishness is the board from which one springs, rather than the ground one must dig. To be a New York Jew is, for Kazin, like being a New York tree. It is what you are.

Reading Kazin, I became a little impatient with my own apologetic attitude toward the poverty of my Jewishness. Wasn’t it the invigorating inheritance of the self-emancipation of my parents? My father had done the deracinating, to become a devotee of Pope and Swift, Molière and Shakespeare, and to reracinate was to be disloyal to him, to the act of emancipation from tribal reflexes that, with a considerable effort of will and imagination, he had pulled off. What is bracing about Kazin is not his Jewishness but that he makes no effort to pretend that he is something else. His liberation lay in not pretending to be Van Wyck Brooks; the liberation for us surely lies in not pretending to be Alfred Kazin.

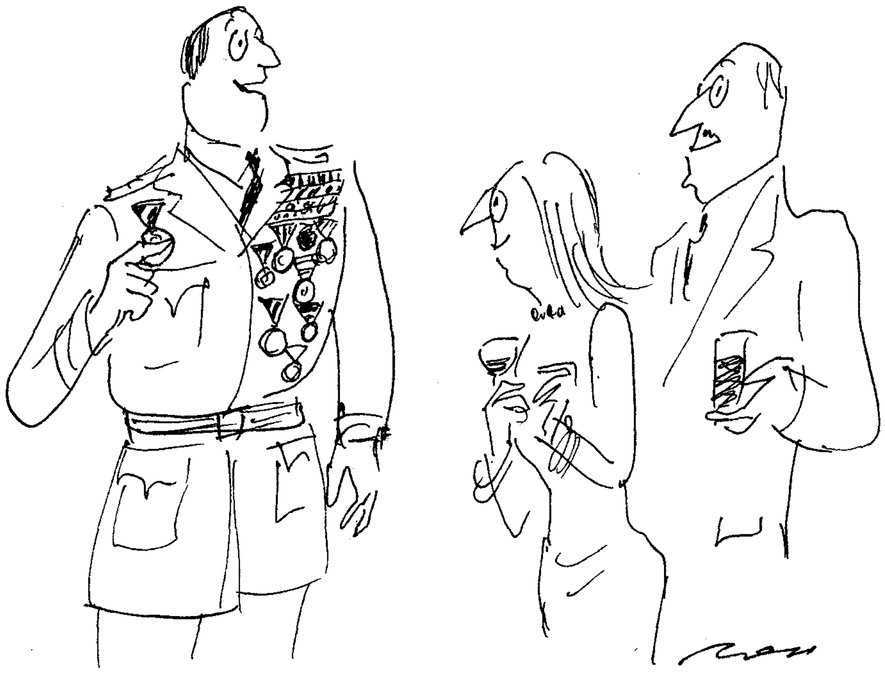
In the midst of these bitter-herb thoughts, Luke came in.

“Here’s the new version,” he said. “Man says to a waiter, ‘What’s this fly doing in my soup?’ ‘Sh-h-h,’ the waiter says, ‘everyone will want one.’ ” It broke me up. Whether or not there are Jewish essences, there are surely some essentially Jewish jokes. That was one, and I was in the middle of another.

I was about to call the Jewish Museum and give it all up, when a friend suggested that I speak to a rabbi. “Go see Rabbi Schorsch,” he said. “He’s the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He’s a terrific guy, and I’m sure he’d be glad to help you out with the spiel thing.” I vaguely remembered hearing Rabbi Ismar Schorsch on the radio once or twice, so I made an appointment—it felt like making a date with a dentist—and on the day I took the subway up to 125th Street.

The rabbi’s secretary showed me into his office, and after a couple of minutes there was Rabbi Schorsch.

“Rabbi,” I began, “I was not raised as an observant Jew, but I am nonetheless of a Jewish background, and I am naturally concerned to show some grasp of a tradition that, though familiar in spirit, is still alien to me in many ways.” I don’t



“This one’s a bonus for all the others.”

know; that's how I thought you ought to talk to a rabbi. Anyway, I eventually explained that I couldn't make head or tail of the Book of Esther.

"It's a spoof, a burlesque, really," he almost mumbled.

He picked up my Bible, riffled through it as though there were a kind of satisfaction just in touching the pages, and then frowned. "This is a Christian Bible," he said, genuinely puzzled.

He was the kind of hyper-alert elderly man who, instead of putting on weight around the middle, seems to have drawn all his energy upward into his eyes and ears, which gleam, outsized. "Yes. It's a kind of comic chapter, not to be taken entirely seriously," he went on, holding my King James Version in his hand as though it might be loaded. "It's a light book with a serious message. You see, Scripture, the Bible, one of the remarkable things about it is that it contains a chapter about every form of human experience. There's a book of laws and a book of love songs. A book of exile and a book of homecoming. A skeptical and despairing book in Job, and an optimistic and sheltering book in the Psalms. Esther is the comic book, it's a book for court Jews, with a fairy-tale, burlesque spirit."

You could see my whole skeleton underneath my jacket; my hair stood on end; I turned into a pile of black ash, smiling sickly as I slowly crumbled.

"It is?" I said.

"Yes. You see, Mordecai is a classic Jew of the Diaspora, not just exiled but entirely assimilated—a court Jew, really. It's a book for court Jews. Why doesn't he bow down to Haman? Well, it might be because of his Judaism. But I think we have to assume that he's jealous—he expects to be made first minister and then isn't. Have you noticed the most interesting thing about the book?" He looked at me keenly.

"I hadn't even noticed it was funny."

"It's the only book in the Bible where God is never mentioned," he said. "This is the book for the Jews of the city, the world. After all, we wonder—what does Esther eat? It sure isn't kosher. But she does good anyway. The worldliness and the absurdity are tied together—the writer obviously knows that the King is a bit of an idiot—but the point is that good can rise from it in any case. Esther acts righteously and saves her people, and we need not worry, too much, about what kind of Jew she was before, or even after. She stays married to the Gentile King, remember. This is the godless, comic book of Jews in the city, and how they struggle to do the righteous thing."

I was stunned. This was, as they say, the story of my life. A funny book about court Jews . . . I had been assigned to burlesque it, when the text was pre-burlesqued, as jeans might be pre-shrunk.

We talked for a while longer, about the background of Haman as a Jew-hater, and of how the most startlingly contemporary thing in the book was the form of anti-Semitism; even twenty-five hundred years ago in Persia, the complaint against the Jews was the same as it is now. In the end, he gave me a signed copy of the Bible, the Jewish Bible, the Tanach. (Signed by him, I mean.)

We got together a couple of times after that, and eventually I decided to try and go ahead with the Purimspiel. He said, "Why not? What have you got to lose?"

What have you got to lose? It was, I reflected, like the punch line of a Jewish joke.

In the ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria, hundreds of people in dinner jackets and sequinned dresses were wearing masks, although this made them look less festive than vaguely embarrassed, as though they were worried about being seen by their friends. I had forgotten the look and feel of a New York benefit: the ballroom made to look like a gym, the chicken, stretched out, mortified, on its plate, with the Indisputably Classy Ingredient—the quince, or sun-dried tomato, or preserved lemon—laid on top of it. The fiftyish women, sexy and intimidating in sports clothes, look wilted in their fancy gowns. The only difference was that at this benefit there was a giant video-projection screen at either end of the hall and one above the podium, and the speakers—who included Rabbi Schorsch, saying the blessing—were projected on them. I gulped. I had thought it would be like a night club, where I could play with a microphone in the manner of Rodney Dangerfield, and this was more like a political convention. I was an impostor, even though I had bits to do. I heard my grandfather's voice: *Feel stiff in the joints? Then stay out of the joints!*

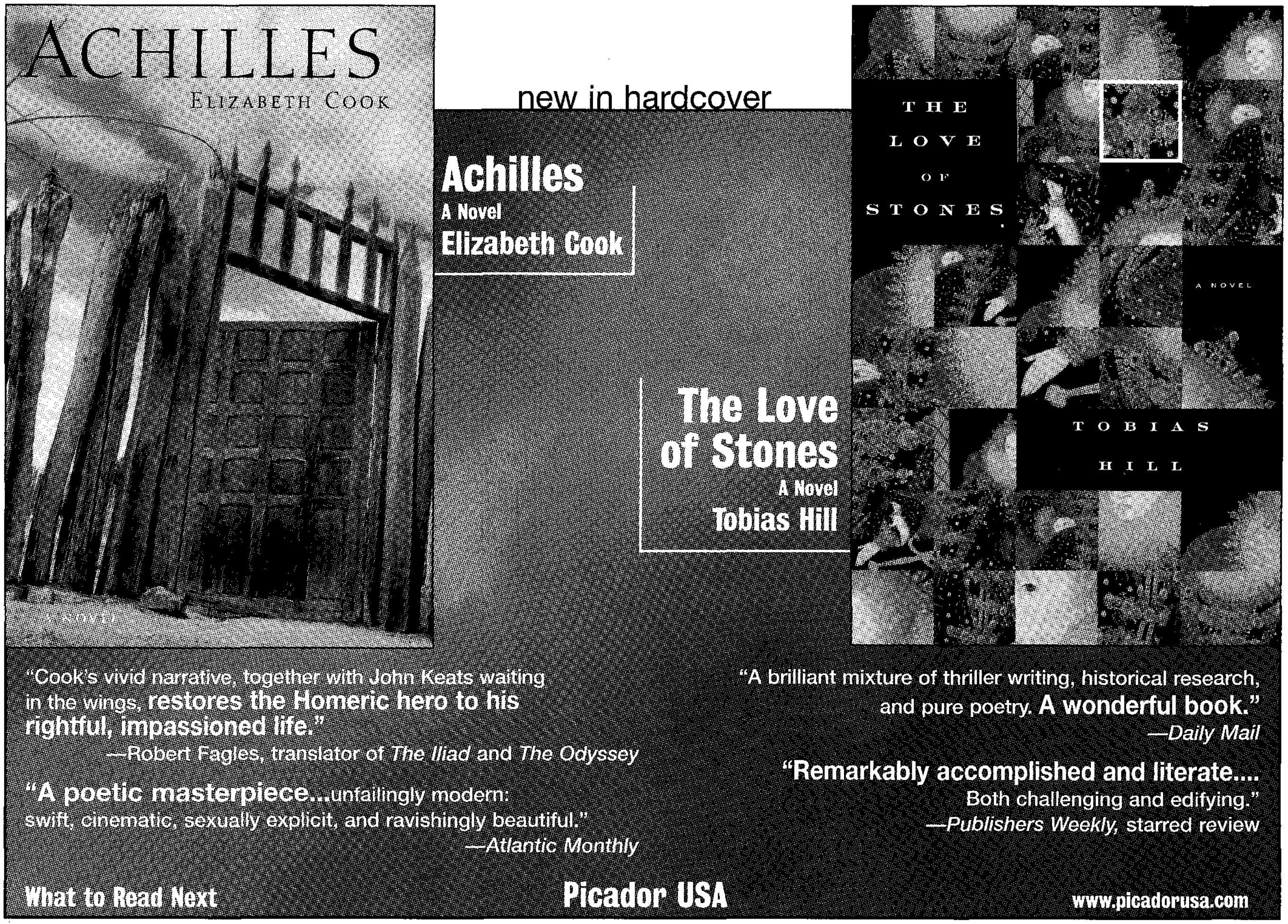
At last, just before dessert, I got up and went to the podium. Out of the corner of my eye I could see my own image on the giant screen.

What did I tell them? Well, I did the New York as Persia, Donald, and Ivana bit and then I did a bit I'd made up that afternoon on Haman. That got a modest laugh, and, encouraged, I went on to do the man-goes-to-see-a-rabbi bit. I said that, once I had thought of transposing the story to New York, I had got stuck on Mordecai. Who could Mordecai be in the modern city? I had gone to see a rabbi, and the rabbi had told me that the Book of Esther was in part a spoof, a burlesque: a comedy in which worldly people took risks and did unworldly things, and that Mordecai, if he was anyone, was us—the assimilated court and city Jews. And this was sort of amazing to me, since the idea that the man of the world might be the honest man was an idea that was central to the comic tradition I revered—Molière says it, for instance, just like that—but was not one that I had known had a place in the Jewish tradition. The Jewish tradition, I had always thought, proposed that the honest man was the man out of the world, the prophet crying in the wilderness. But I saw now that there was a connection between a certain kind of comedy, the comedy of assimilation, and a certain kind of courage, the courage to use your proximity to power, bought at the price of losing your "identity," to save your kinsmen. The real moral center of the story, I saw now, lay in the tiny, heartbreaking, and in many ways comic moment when Esther—trayf-eating, dim-witted, overdressed, sexy Esther—appears before the King, who hasn't found her particularly sexy lately. I could see her in her Lacroix pouf dress, I said, gulping for breath and showing up, so to speak, at Donald Trump's office in the middle of a busy day saying that she had to speak to him. But she did, and the Jews were saved, for once.

It went over O.K. I didn't kill them, but I didn't die, either. They were expecting something more consistently amusing, I suppose, but no one minds a little moral sententiousness in an after-dinner speaker. "Congratulations, that was unusual," or "You obviously spoke from the heart," or "I knew that when we asked you to do the Purimspiel we would get something different!," or just "Thank you for your interesting remarks" was the general tone of the things that people said when I got back to the table. (I still meet people who were there. They give me exactly the look a father might have after seeing his daughter topless in a progressive college production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; he respects the sincerity of the intention, but it was extremely embarrassing to be there, nonetheless.) I had dessert—fund-raising-benefit dessert, something soft and white interspersed with something red and juicy—and went home. As a thank-you present, I was given a little silver grogger, a rattle, meant to be shaken when you heard the name "Haman."

Though I am not strangely exhilarated by my experience as a Purimspieler, I did find something significant in the Book of Esther, and I am certainly glad I did it. In one way, it was no different from any other exposure to an ancient, irrational belief-culture. I suppose I would have felt about the same if I had been a young Athenian who finally goes to Delphi and hears the oracle: even if it didn't change the future, it was nice to make the trip. But if there is something particularly Jewish about the experience, it may lie in the odd combination of a narrow gate and a large gathering; the most exclusive and tribal of faiths, Judaism is also the one that sustains the most encompassing of practices, from Moses to Henny Youngman, from Esther to Sammy Davis, Jr., and all us Irvings. Whether it sustains this because, as the rabbi believes, it is in its nature narrow but infinitely various, or because, as I sometimes suspect, anything ancient and oppressed must be adaptable, still it is so. At least for a certain kind of court Jew, being Jewish remains not an exercise in reading in or reading past but just in reading on, in continuing to turn the pages. The pages have been weird and varied enough in the past to be weird and varied in the future, and there is no telling who will shine in them. The Jewish occasion lay in rising to the occasion. Even if it was too late to be an everyday, starting Jew, one could still be, so to speak, Jewish in the clutch.

We celebrated our own Seder this past spring, and are thinking of joining the synagogue we can see from our window, in part because we want to, in part because there is an excellent nursery school there for our daughter. That is the kind of things Jews do in Persia. I gave the silver grogger to the baby, who holds it at the window and shakes it in warning when she sees a dog. I believe that she now has the first things a Jewish girl in exile needs: a window to see from and a rattle to shake. ◆



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PERSONAL HISTORY

IN RONNIE'S COURT

A son's criminal pursuit.

BY JOHN LE CARRÉ

ON BEING BORN AND OTHER ADVENTURES

I have seen the house often. Cheerful aunts have bellowed its name at me as we skim by: "That's the place, David!" (In real life my first name is David.) "They should turn it into a national museum!" But the house I prefer is a different one, built in my imagination. It's red brick and clattery and due for demolition, with broken windows, a "For Sale" sign, and an old bath in the garden. It stands in a plot of weed and builders' junk, with a bit of stained glass in the smashed front door—a place for kids to hide in, rather than be born. But born there I was, or so my imagination insists, and what's more I was born in the attic, among a stack of brown boxes that my father always carted round with him when he was on the run. When I made my first clandestine inspection of those boxes, sometime around the outbreak of the Second World War, they contained only personal stuff: his Masonic regalia, the barrister's wig and gown with which he proposed to astonish a waiting world as soon as he had got round to studying law, top-secret plans for selling fleets of airships to the Aga Khan. But once war broke out, the brown boxes offered more substantial fare: black-market Mars bars, Benzedrine inhalers for shooting stimulant up your nose, and, after D Day, nylon stockings and ballpoint pens.

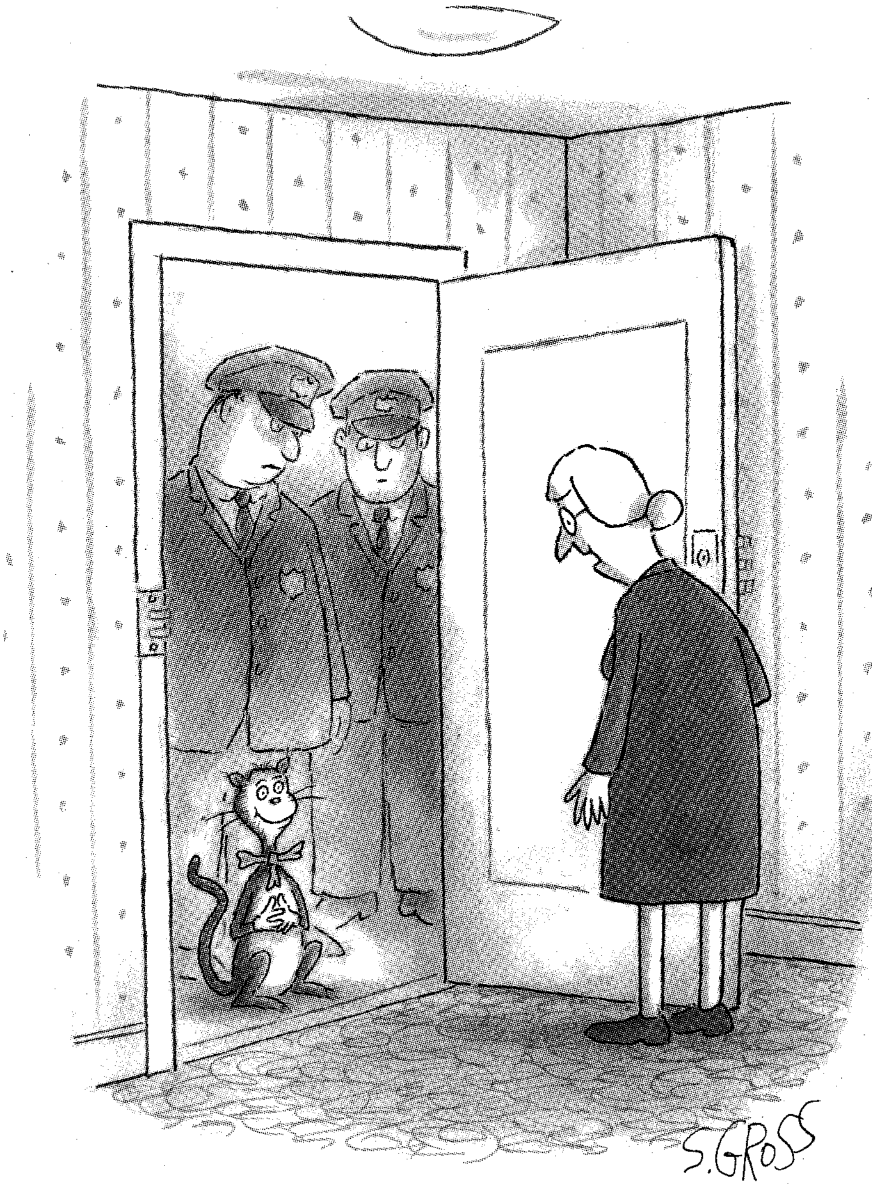
My father always had a penchant for weird commodities provided they were rationed or not available, like plastic orange-peelers that broke after the first orange. Two decades later, when Germany was still divided and I was still a British diplomat living on the banks of the river Rhine in Bonn, he appeared unannounced in my gateway, perched inside a steel coracle with wheels attached. It was an amphibious motorcar, he explained.

He had acquired the British patent from its manufacturers in Berlin, and it was about to make our fortunes. He had driven it down the interzonal corridor under the gaze of East German frontier guards, and now he proposed to launch it, with my help, into the Rhine, which happened to be swollen at the time, and very fast flowing. I dissuaded him despite my children's enthusiasm and gave him lunch instead. Refreshed, he set off in great excitement for Ostend and England. How far he got I don't know, for the car was not spoken of again. I assume that somewhere along the journey creditors caught up with him and removed it. But that didn't stop him from returning to Berlin, which like other war-torn cities exercised an energetic attraction over him. A couple of years later he popped up there again, announcing himself this time as my "professional adviser," in which capacity he graciously accepted a V.I.P. tour of West Berlin's largest film studio, and a great deal of the studio's hospitality, and no doubt a starlet or two, and listened to a lot of earnest talk about tax breaks and subsidies available to foreign filmmakers, all in the noble cause of finding the best place to make the movie of his son's recent novel, "The Spy Who Came In from the Cold." It goes without saying that neither his son nor Paramount Pictures, who owned the film rights, had the least idea of what he was up to.

There's no electricity in the house of my birth, and no heating, so the light comes from the gas lamps on Constitution Hill, which give the attic a creamy glow. My mother lies on a camp bed, pitifully doing her best, whatever her best may entail—I was not conversant with the niceties of childbirth when I first pictured this scene. My father, Ronnie Cornwell, is champing in the doorway in a snappy gent's double-breasted and the brown-and-white brogues he played golf in, keeping an eye to the street while, in pounding cadences, he urges my mother to greater efforts: "God in Heaven, Wiggly, why can't you get a move on for once? It's a damned shame is what it is, and no two ways about it. There's poor old Humphries catching his death out there and all you do is shilly-shally."

Though my mother's first name was Olive, my father called her Wiggly, rain or shine. Later, when technically I grew up, I, too, gave women silly nicknames in order to make them less formidable. My father's voice when I was young was still Dorset, with heavy "r"s and long "a"s. But the self-laundering was in progress and by the time I was an adolescent he was almost—but never quite—well spoken. Englishmen, as we know, are branded on

The author, above, at Sherborne, at age fourteen, and his father, Ronnie Cornwell, opposite, at Royal Ascot, in the nineteen-fifties.



"He had a hat!"

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the tongue, and in those days the brand really meant something. Being well spoken could gain you a military commission, bank credit, respectful treatment from policemen, and a job in the City of London. And it's one of the ironies of Ronnie's mercurial life that, by realizing his ambition of sending my brother and me to posh schools, he placed himself socially below us by the cruel standards of the time. Tony and I were whisked effortlessly through the class sound barrier, while Ronnie remained an upstart. Not that he ever exactly paid for our education—or not in full, so far as I can make out—but he fixed it, which in Ronnie's eyes was what counted, particularly in the war years. One school, after a taste of his ways, bravely demanded its fees up front. It received them at Ronnie's leisure in deferred black-market dried fruit—figs, bananas, prunes—and a case of unobtainable gin for the staff.

Yet he remained, which was his genius, to all outward appearances a most respectable man. Respect, not money, was what he cared for above everything. Every day he had to have his magic recognized. His judgment of other people depended entirely on how much they respected him. At the humble level of life, it's true, there is a Ronnie prototype in every second street in London, in every county town. He's the back-slapping, two-fisted tearaway naughty boy with a touch of the blarney, who throws champagne parties for people who aren't used to being given champagne, opens his garden to the local Baptists for their fête though he never sets foot inside their church, is honorary president of the boys' football team and the men's cricket team and presents them with silver cups for their championships. Until one day it turns out he hasn't paid the milkman for a year, or the local garage, or the newspaper shop, or the wine shop, or the shop that sold him the silver cups, and maybe he goes bankrupt or goes to jail, and his wife takes the children to live with her mother, and soon she divorces him because she discovers—and her mother knew it all along—that he's been screwing every girl in the neighborhood and has kids he hasn't mentioned. And when our naughty boy comes out or gets himself temporarily straight, he lives small for a while and does good works and takes pleasure in simple things, till the sap rises again and he's back to his old games.

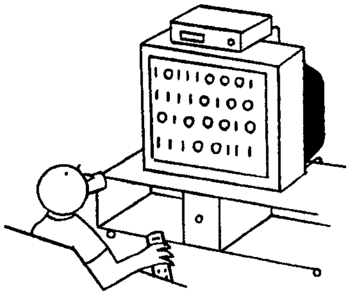
My father was that fellow, no question, all of the above. But that was only the beginning. The difference was in degree, in style, in scale. It was in his episcopal bearing, his ecumenical voice, his air of injured sanctity, and his infinite powers of self-delusion. While our standard naughty boy is blowing the last of the housekeeping on the three-thirty at Newmarket, Ronnie is relaxing serenely at the big table in Monte Carlo with a complimentary brandy-and-ginger in front of him, me, aged seventeen and pretending to be older, on one side of him, and King Farouk's equerry, aged fifty-plus, on the other. The equerry is well known at this table. He is polished, gray-haired, innocuous, and very tired, and he has a white telephone at his elbow, compliments of the casino management. It links him directly to his Egyptian king, whom we imagine in one of his palaces, surrounded by astrologers. The white phone rings, the equerry wearily takes his hands from his chin, raises the receiver, listens with his long eyelids lowered, and in a trance transfers another chunk of the wealth of Egypt to red, or black, or whatever number is considered propitious by the zodiacal wizards of Alexandria or Cairo.

For some while now Ronnie has been observing this, smiling a sanctimonious little smile to himself that says, If that's the way you want it, old son, that's the way it's got to be. And gradually he starts to raise his own bids around the table. Purposefully. A great strategist disposes of his troops. Tens become twenties. Twenties become fifties. And as he splashes out the last of his chips and to my alarm beckons imperiously for more, I realize he is not playing a hunch, or playing the house, or playing the numbers. He is playing King Farouk. If Farouk favors black, Ronnie goes for red. If Farouk backs odd, Ronnie raises him on even. We are talking hundreds by now (these days thousands). And what Ronnie is telling His Egyptian Majesty—as a term's worth, then a year's worth, of my school fees vanish into the croupier's maw—is that Ronnie's line to the Almighty is a great deal more efficacious than some tin-pot Arab potentate's. Ronnie is blessed, whereas Farouk doesn't rate a bean in God's great plan—not even when Ronnie sinks gracefully to the seabed with his flag flying. In the soft blue twilight of Monte Carlo before dawn, we saunter side by side along the esplanade to a twenty-four-hour jeweller's shop to pawn his platinum cigarette case—Bucherer? Boucheron? I'm warm. "Win it all back tomorrow with interest, right, old son?" Ronnie assures me in the foyer of the Hôtel de Paris, where he has mercifully prepaid our room bill. "Showed that chap Farouk a thing or two. Lost twice as much as I did. Three times." And though it may never have happened, it equally well might be that a few days later, having exchanged visiting cards with the equerry, Ronnie would be on the phone to Cairo introducing himself as the chap who played a bit of arm's-length roulette with His Majesty the other night, and by an odd coincidence Ronnie was visiting the Middle East next week, and was there any chance the King was free for a drink because, if so, Ronnie would make it his business to be free, too. . . . And if it didn't work that time it would work some other time in some other country, because Ronnie was a living advertisement for his own truism that, provided you've got a clean shirt and ask nicely, God will always give you a fair crack of the whip.

So I am born. Of my mother, Olive. Obediently, with the haste Ronnie has demanded of her. In a final push to forestall creditors and prevent Mr. Humphries from catching his death while he crouches outside in his Lanchester. For Mr. Humphries is not just a cabdriver but a valued confederate, as well as a fully paid-up member of the Court, and a distinguished amateur conjurer who does tricks with bits of rope like hangman's nooses. In high times he is replaced by Mr. Nutbeam and a Bentley, but in low times Mr. Humphries with his Lanchester is always ready to oblige. I am born, and packed up with my mother's few possessions, for we have recently suffered another bailiff's visitation and are travelling light. I am loaded into the boot of Mr. Humphries' taxi like one of Ronnie's contraband hams a few years hence. The brown boxes are thrown in after me and the lid of the boot is locked from the outside. I peer around in the darkness for a sign of my elder brother, Tony. He is not in evidence. Neither is Olive, alias Wiggly. Never mind. I have been born and, like a brand-new foal, am already on the run. I have been on the run ever since.

I HAVE MY FIRST TASTE OF PRISON

I have another confected childhood memory that, according to my father, who had every right to know, is equally inaccurate. It is four years later, and I am in the city of Exeter, walking across a patch of wasteland. I am holding the hand of my mother, Olive, alias Wiggly. As we are both wearing gloves, there is no fleshly contact between us. And indeed, so far as I recall, there never was any. It was Ronnie who did the hugging, never Olive. She was the mother who had no smell, whereas Ronnie smelled of fine cigars, and pear-droppy hair oil from Taylor of Bond Street, Court Hairdresser, and when you put your nose into the fleecy cloth of one of Mr. Berman's tailored suits you seemed to smell his women there as well. Yet when, at the age of twenty-one, I advanced on Olive down No. 1 platform at Ipswich railway station for our great reunion after sixteen hugless years, I couldn't work out for the life of me where to grab hold of her. She was as tall as I remembered her, but all elbow and no huggable contours. With her toppling walk and long, vulnerable face she could have been my brother Tony in a white wig.



I am in Exeter again, swinging on Olive's gloved hand. At the far side of the wasteland is a road from which I see a high red brick wall with spikes and broken glass along its top, and behind the wall a grim flat-fronted building with barred windows and no light inside them. And in one of these barred windows, looking exactly like a Monopoly convict when you go directly to jail, without passing Go or collecting two hundred pounds, stands my father from the shoulders up. Like the Monopoly man, he is clutching the bars with both big hands. Women always told him what lovely hands he had and he was forever grooming them with clippers from his jacket pocket. His wide white forehead is pressed against the bars. He never had much hair, and what there was of it ran fore and aft over his crown in a tight black, sweet-smelling river, stopping short of the dome that did so much for his saintly image of himself. As he grew older, the river turned gray, then dried up altogether, but the wrinkles of age and dissolution that he had so richly earned never materialized. Goethe's Eternal Feminine prevailed in him till the end. He was as proud of his head as he was of his hands, according to Olive, and soon after their marriage mortgaged it for fifty pounds to medical science, cash in advance and the goods to be delivered on his death. I don't know when she told me this, but I know that from the day this knowledge was entrusted to me, I eyed Ronnie with something of the detachment of an executioner. His neck was very broad, hardly a kink where it joined his upper body. I wondered where I would aim the axe if I were doing the job. Killing him was an early preoccupation of mine, and it has endured off and on even after his death. Probably it is no more than my exasperation that I could absolutely never pin him down.

Still clutching Olive's gloved hand, I wave at Ronnie high up in the wall and

Ronnie waves the way he always waved: leaning back and with the upper body dead still while one prophetic arm commands the skies above his head. "Daddy, Daddy!" I yell. My voice is a giant frog's. On Olive's hand I march back to the car feeling thoroughly pleased with myself. Not every small boy, after all, has his mother to himself and keeps his father in a cage.

But, according to my father, none of this happened. The notion that I might have seen him in any of his prisons offended him very much—"Sheer invention from start to finish, son." All right, he conceded, he did a bit of time in Exeter, but mostly he was in Winchester and the Scrubs. He'd done nothing criminal, nothing that couldn't have been sorted out between reasonable people. He'd been in the position of the office boy who'd borrowed a few bob from the stamp box and been caught before he had a chance to put them back. But that wasn't the point, he insisted. The point, as he confided to my half sister Charlotte, his daughter by another marriage, when he was complaining about my generally disrespectful behavior toward him—i.e., I wouldn't give him a cut of my royalties or put up a few hundred thousand to develop a nice bit of greenbelt he'd gulled out of some misguided local council—the point *was* that anyone who knows the inside of Exeter jail knows perfectly well you can't see the road from the cells.

And I believe him. Still. I'm wrong and he was right. He was never at that window and I never waved to him. But what's the truth? What's memory? We should find another name for the way we see past events that are still alive in us. I *saw* him in that window but I also *see* him there now, grasping the bars, his bull's chest encased in the convict's uniform, with arrows printed on it, as worn in all the best school comics. There is a part of me that never afterward saw him wearing anything else. And I know I was four years old when I saw him because a year later he was at large again, and a few weeks or months after that my mother slipped away in the night, disappearing for sixteen years before I rediscovered her in Suffolk, the mother of two other children. She took with her one fine white hide suitcase by Harrods, silk-lined, which I found in her cottage when she died. It was the only thing in the whole house that bore witness to her first marriage, and I have it still.

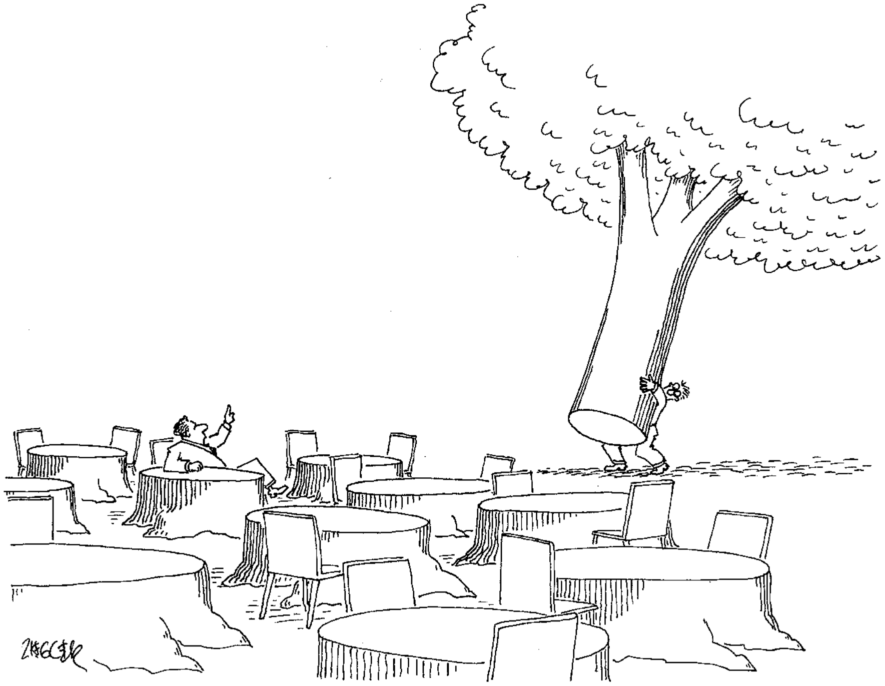
I saw him crouching in his cell, too, on the edge of his bunk with his mortgaged head in his hands, a proud young man who'd never in his life gone hungry or washed his own socks or made his own bed, thinking of his three pious, doting sisters and two adoring parents, his mother heartbroken and forever wringing her hands and asking God "Why, why?" in her Irish brogue, and his father a former mayor of Poole, an alderman and freemason. Both serving Ronnie's time with him in their minds. Both turning prematurely white-haired while they waited for him. How could Ronnie bear knowing all that while he stared at the wall? With his pride and prodigious energy and drive, how did he cope with the confinement? I'm as restless as he was. I can't sit still for an hour. I can't read a book for an hour unless it's in German, which somehow keeps me in my chair. Even at a good play, I long for the interval and a stretch. When I'm writing, I'm forever bouncing up from my desk and charging round the garden or up the street. I've only to lock myself in the loo for three seconds—the key has fallen out of its hole and I'm fumbling to get it back in—and I'm in a Force 12 sweat and screaming to be let out. Yet Ronnie at the prime of his life did serious time—three or four years. He was still serving one sentence when they slapped some more charges on him and gave him a second. The bits of prison time he did in later life—Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta, Zurich—were weeks or months at most.

Researching "The Honourable Schoolboy," in Hong Kong, I came face to face with his ex-jailer at the Jardine Matheson tent at Happy Valley racecourse.

"Mr. Cornwell, sir, your father is one of the finest men I ever met. It was a privilege to look after him. I'm retiring soon and when I get back to London he's going to fix me up in business." Even in prison, Ronnie was fattening his jailer for the pot.

I am in Chicago, supporting a lacklustre campaign to sell British goods abroad. The British Consul General, with whom I am staying, hands me a telegram. It is from our Ambassador in Jakarta telling me that Ronnie is in prison and will I buy him out? I promise to pay whatever needs to be paid. To my alarm, it is only a few hundred. Ronnie must be down on his luck.

From the *Bezirksgefängnis* in Zurich, where he has been imprisoned for hotel fraud, he telephones me, reversing the charges. "Son? It's your old man." What can I do for you, Father? "You can get me out of this damned jail, son. It's all a misunderstanding. These boys just won't look at the facts." How much? No answer. Just an actor's gulp before a drowning voice delivers the punch line: "I can't do any more prison, son." Then the sobs



that as usual go through me like slow knives.

I asked my two surviving aunts. They speak the way Ronnie spoke when he was young: in light, unconscious Dorset accents that I really like. How did Ronnie take it, that first stretch? How did it affect him? Who was he before prison? Who was he after it? But the aunts are not historians, they're sisters. They love Ronnie, and prefer not to think beyond their love. The scene they remember best was Ronnie shaving on the morning of the day the verdict was to be announced at Winchester Assizes. He had defended himself from the dock the previous day and was certain he would be home free that evening. It was the first time the aunts were allowed to watch him shave. But the only answer I get from them is in their eyes and dropped words: "It was terrible. Just terrible." They are talking about the shame as if it were yesterday rather than seventy years ago.

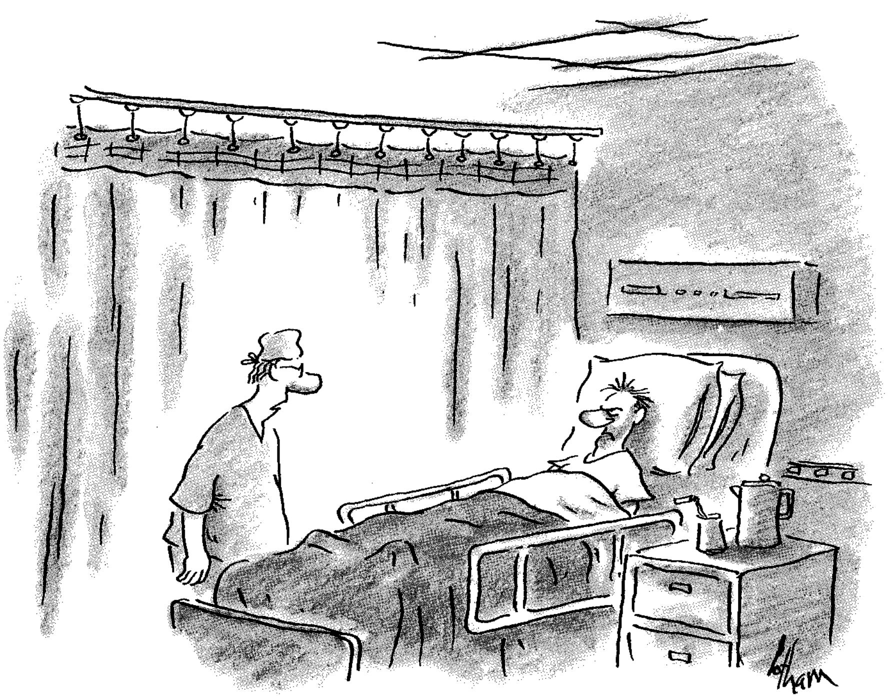
Forty-something years earlier I had asked my mother, Olive, the same question. Unlike the aunts, who prefer to keep their memories to themselves, Olive was a tap you couldn't turn off. From the moment of our reunion at Ipswich railway station, she talked about Ronnie non-stop. She talked about his sexuality long before I had sorted out mine, and for ease of reference gave me a tattered hardback copy of Krafft-Ebing's "Psychopathia Sexualis" as a map to guide me through her husband's appetites before and after jail.

"*Changed*, dear? In *prison*? Not a bit of it! You were totally *un*changed. You'd lost weight, of course—well, you would. Prison food isn't *meant* to be nice." And then the image that will never leave me, not least because she seemed unaware of what she was saying: "And you did have this silly habit of stopping in front of doors and waiting at attention with your head down till I opened them for you. They were perfectly *ordinary* doors, not locked or anything, but you obviously weren't *expecting* to be able to open them for yourself."

Why did Olive refer to Ronnie as *you*? *You* meaning *he*, but subconsciously recruiting me to be his surrogate, which by the time of her death was what I had become?

There is an audiotape that Olive made for my brother Tony, all about her life with Ronnie. Twenty years after her death I still can't bear to play it, so all I've ever heard is scraps. On the tape, she describes how Ronnie used to beat her up, which, according to Olive, was what prompted her to bolt. Ronnie's violence was not news to me because he had made a habit of beating up his second wife as well: so often and so purposefully, and coming home at such odd hours of the night to do it, that, seized by a chivalrous impulse, I appointed myself her ridiculous protector, sleeping on a mattress in front of her bedroom door and clutching a golf iron so that Ronnie would have to reckon with me before he got at her. Would I really have struck him on his mortgaged head? Might I indeed have killed him, and followed in his footsteps to prison? Or just given him a hug and wished him good night? I'll never know, but I have played the possibilities in my memory so often that all of them are true.

Certainly Ronnie beat me up, too, but only a few times and not with much conviction. It was the shaping up that was the scary part: the lowering and readying of the shoulders, the resetting of the jaw. And when I was grown up Ronnie tried to sue me, which I suppose is violence in disguise. He had watched a television documentary of my life and decided there was an implicit slander in my failure to mention that I owed everything to him.



"It's not our policy to disclose details of a future operation."

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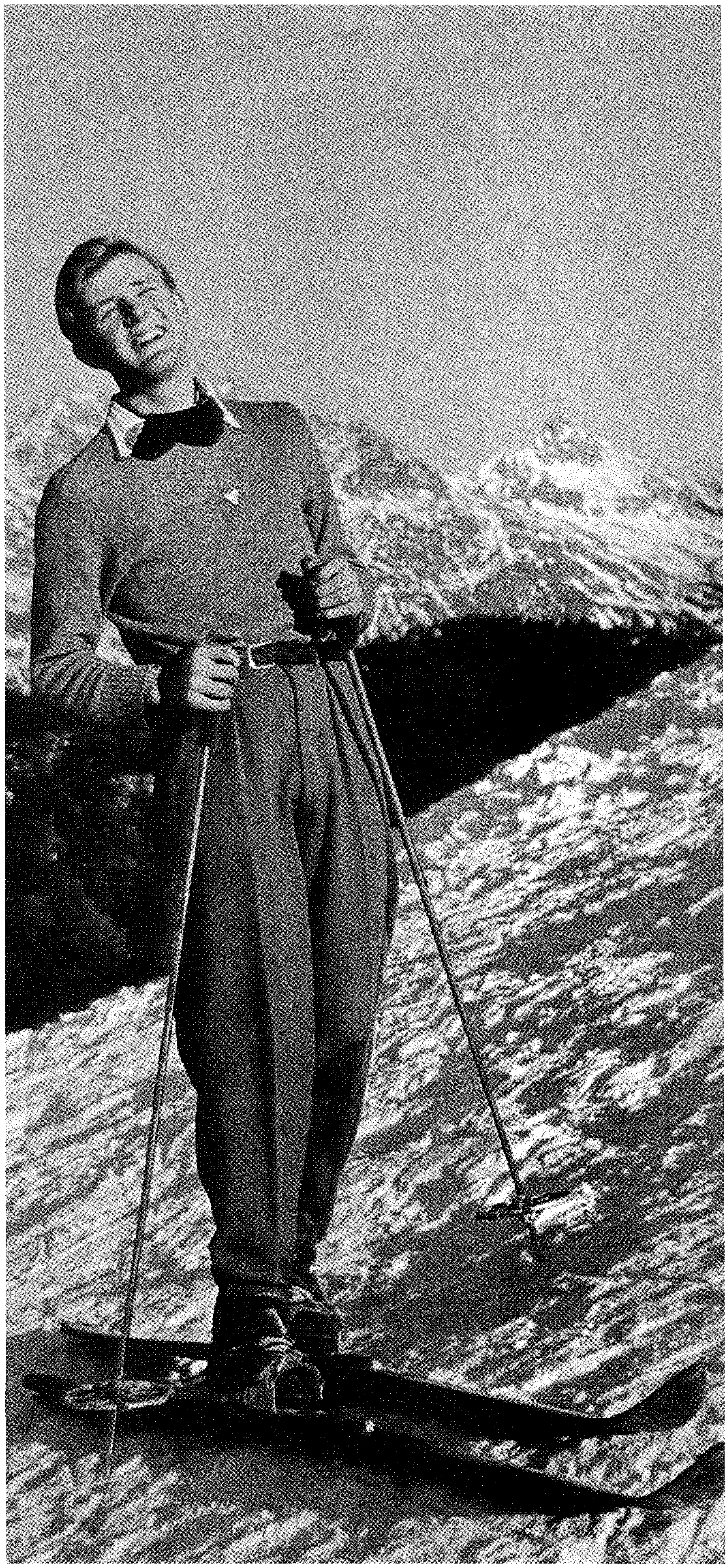
OF RONNIE AND OLIVE'S COURTSHIP AND THE SPECTRAL UNCLE ALEC

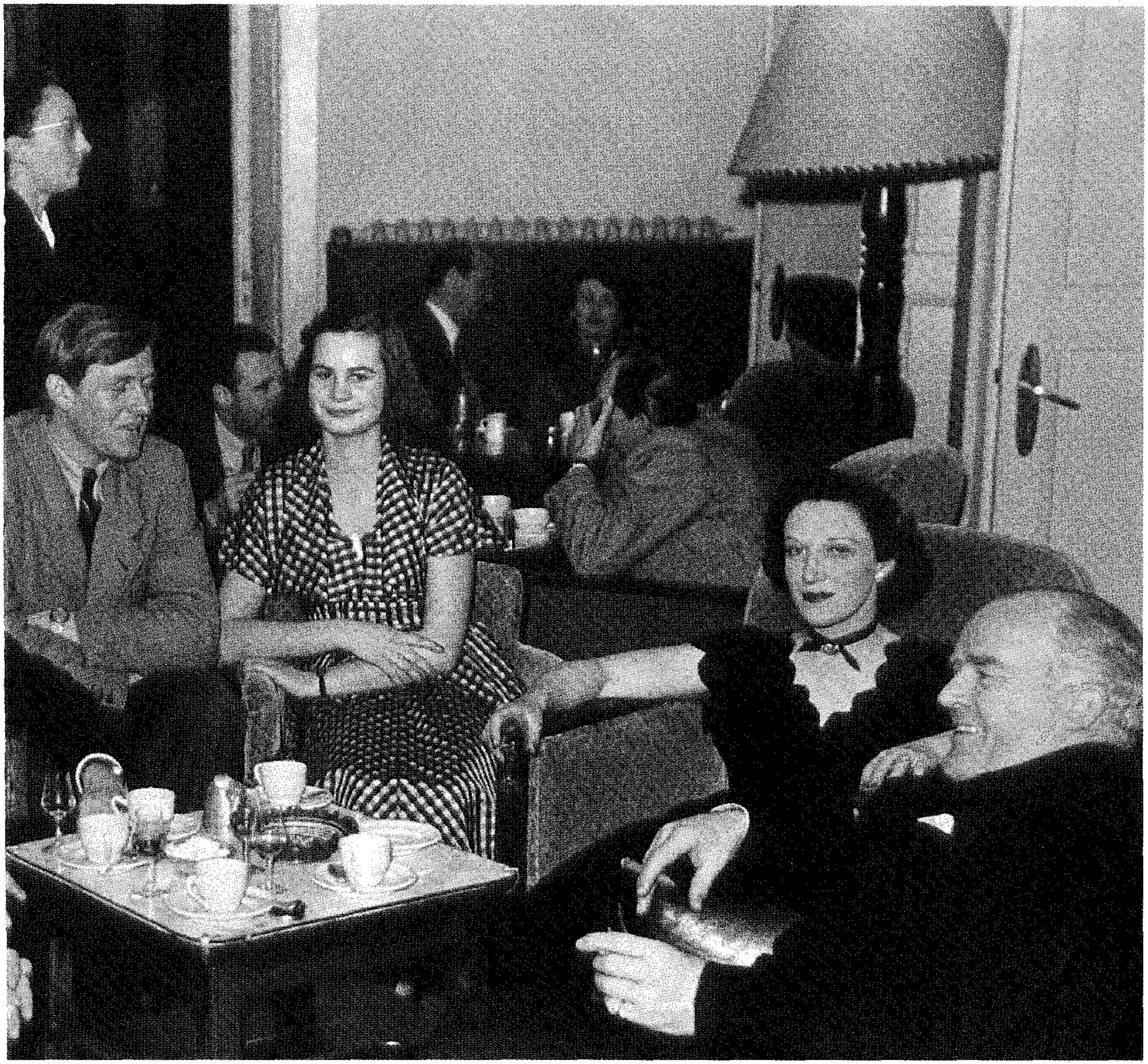
How did Olive and Ronnie first get together? I asked her this question in my Krafft-Ebing period, not long after that first remembered hug at Ipswich station. "Through your Uncle Alec, dear," she replied. She was referring to her estranged brother, her senior by twenty-five years. Their parents were both long dead, so Uncle Alec, a grandee of Poole, Member of Parliament, and fabled local preacher, was her effective father. Like Olive, he was thin and bony and very tall, but also vain, a natty dresser with a great sense of his social importance. Appointed to present a cup to a local football team, Uncle Alec took Olive along with him, in the manner of one schooling a future princess in the exercise of her public duties. Ronnie was the team's center forward. Where else could he possibly play? As Uncle Alec moved along the line, shaking hands with each player, Olive trailed behind him, pinning a badge to each proud breast. But when



The author at around sixteen in Saint-Morit

she pinned one to Ronnie's he fell dramatically to his knees, complaining she had pierced him to the heart, which he was clutching with both hands. Uncle Alec, who on all known evidence was a pompous arse, loftily condoned the horseplay, and Ronnie with impressive meekness inquired whether he might call at the great house on Sunday afternoons to pay his respects—not to Olive, naturally, who was socially far above him—but to an Irish housemaid with whom he had struck up an acquaintance. Uncle Alec graciously gave his consent and Ronnie, under cover of wooing the maid, seduced Olive.

"I was so lonely, darling. And you



ft and above, with, from left, two British pilots; Ann Sharp, later the author's first wife; Ronnie's second wife, Jean; and Ronnie.

were such a ball of fire." The fire, of course, was Ronnie, not me.

Uncle Alec was my first secret source and I blew him sky high. It was to Alec that I had secretly written on my twenty-first birthday—Alec Glassey, M.P., care of the House of Commons, *Private*—to inquire whether his sister, my mother, was alive and, if so, where she might be found. I had of course asked Ronnie the same question when I was younger, but he had only frowned and shaken his head, so after a few more shots I gave up. In a two-line scrawl Uncle Alec advised me that I would find her address on the attached piece of paper. A condition of this information was that I should never tell "the person concerned" where I had it from. Stimulated by the injunction, I blurted out the truth to Olive within moments of our meeting.

"Then we must be grateful to him, dear," she said, and that was all.

Or it *should* have been all, except that forty years later in New Mexico, and several years after my mother's death, my brother Tony informed me that on his twenty-first birthday, two years before mine, he, too, had written to Alec, had taken the train to Olive, hugged her on No. 1 platform and probably, thanks to his height, achieved a better grasp than I had. And he had debriefed her. So why had Tony not told me all this? Why hadn't I told him? Why had Olive told neither of us about the other? Why had Alec tried to keep us all apart?

The answer is fear of Ronnie, which for all of us was like fear of life itself. His reach, psychological and physical, and his terrible charm were inescapable. He was a walking Rolodex of connections. When one of his women was discovered to be consoling herself with a lover, Ronnie went to work like a one-man war room. Within an hour he had a line to the wretched man's employer, his bank manager, his landlord, and his wife's father. Each was recruited as an agent of destruction. And what Ronnie had done to a helpless erring husband he could do to all of us tenfold. Ronnie wrecked as he created. Every time I am moved to admire him, I remember his victims. His own mother, freshly bereaved, the sobbing executrix of his father's estate; his second wife's mother, also widowed, also in dazed possession of her late husband's fortune: Ronnie robbed them both, depriving them of their husbands' savings and the proper heirs of their inheritance. Dozens, scores of others, all trusting, all by Ronnie's noble standards deserving of his protection: conned, robbed, ripped off by their knight errant. How did he explain this to himself, if at all? The racehorses, parties, women, and Bentleys that furnished his other life while he was gulling money out of people so helpless with love for him that they couldn't say no? Did Ronnie ever count the cost of being God's chosen boy?

WALKING TO MARTHA'S VINEYARD

And the ocean smells like lilacs in late August—how
is that.

The light there muted (silver) as remembered light.

Do you have any children?

No, lucky for them.

Bad things happen when you get hands, dolphin.

Can you tell us a little bit about your upbringing?

There is no down or up in space or in the womb.

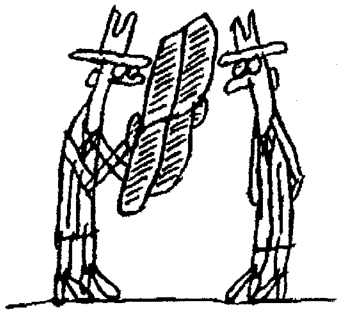
If they'd stabbed me to death on the day I was born, it
would have been an act of mercy.

Like the light the last room, the windowless room at the
end, must look out on. Gold-tinged, blue

IN WHICH I HIRE DETECTIVES TO INVESTIGATE THE REAL ME

I keep no diary and never have done. I keep few letters, and most of Ronnie's to me were so awful I destroyed them almost before I read them: begging letters from America, India, Singapore, and Indonesia; hortatory letters forgiving me my trespasses and urging me to love him, pray for him, make the best use of the advantages he had lavished on me, and send him money; bullying demands that I repay the cost of my education; and doom-laden prognostications of his imminent death. I don't regret having thrown them away; sometimes I wish I could throw away the memory of them, too. Occasionally, despite my best efforts, a shred of his inextinguishable past turns up to tease me: a page of one of his typed letters on flimsy airmail paper, for instance, advising me of some crazy scheme he wants me to "bring to the Attention of your Advisors with a View to Early Investment." Or an old business adversary of Ronnie writes to me, always tenderly, always grateful to have known him, even if the experience proved costly.

A couple of years back, dickering on the brink of an autobiography and frustrated by the poverty of collateral information, I hired a pair of detectives, one thin, one fat, both recommended by a rugged London solicitor, and both good eaters. Go out into the world, I said to them airily. Be my guests. Find the living witnesses and the written record and bring me a factual account of myself and my family and my father and I will reward you. I'm a liar, I explained. Born to lying, bred to it, trained to it by an industry that lies for a living, practiced in it as a novelist. As a maker of fictions, I invent versions of myself, never the real thing, if it exists. So what I'll do is this, I said. I'll let my imaginative memory rip on the left-hand page, and I'll put your factual record on the right-hand page, unchanged and unadorned. And in that way my readers will see for themselves to what extent an old writer's memory is the whore of his imagination. We all reinvent our pasts, I said, but writers are in a class of their own. Even when they know the truth, it's never enough for them. I directed them to Ronnie's dates and names and places and suggested they dig out the court records. I imagined them hunting down vital sources while there were still a few around, former secretaries, prison officers and policemen. I told them to do the same with my school record, my Army record, and, since I had several times been the subject of official security checks, the assessments of my trustworthiness by the services we used to regard as secret. I urged them to stop at nothing in their search for me. I told them about my father's scams, domestic and foreign, everything I could remember: how he attempted to con the Prime Ministers of Singapore and Malaysia in Britain's two largest football pools and, within a whisker, brought it off. But it was the same whisker that always let him down. I told them about his little "extra families" and mistress-mothers, keepers of the flame, who, in his own words to me, were always there to cook him a sausage if he dropped by. I gave them the names of a couple of the women I knew about, and an address or two, and the names of the children—whose is anybody's guess. I told them about Ronnie's war service, which consisted of using every trick in the book not to do any, including standing in parliamentary by-elections under such rousing banners as "Independent Progressive," which obliged



vapor trail breaking up now like the white line you see,
after driving all day, when your eyes close;

vapor trail breaking up now between huge clouds resembling
a kind of Mt. Rushmore of your parents' faces.

And these untravelled windy back roads here—cotton
leaves blowing past me, in the long blue
horizontal light—

if I am on an island, how is it they go on forever.

This sky like an infinite tenderness, I have caught
glimpses of that, often, so often, and never yet have
I described it, I can't, somehow, I never will.

How is it that I didn't spend my whole life being
happy, loving other human beings' faces.

And wave after wave, the ocean smells like lilacs in
late August.

—*Franz Wright*

the Army to release him to exercise his democratic rights. And how, even while he was being trained, he kept a couple of courtiers and a secretary or two on hand, billeted in local hotels, so that he could pursue his legitimate business of war profiteer and trader in shortages. In the immediate postwar years, it is my conviction, Ronnie improved upon his Army record by awarding himself the alias of Colonel Cornhill, by which name he was well known in the shadier corners of the West End. When my half sister Charlotte was playing in a film about a notorious gangland family in East London called the Kray brothers, she consulted the eldest brother, Charlie, in order to collect material for the part. Over a nice cup of tea, Charlie Kray dug out the family photo album, and there was Ronnie with an arm round the two younger brothers.

I told them about the night I checked into the Royal Hotel in Copenhagen and was at once invited to visit the manager. I assumed my fame had gone ahead of me. It hadn't, but Ronnie's had. He was wanted by the Danish police. And there they were, two of them, upright like schoolboys in correction chairs against the wall. Ronnie, they said, had entered Copenhagen illegally from the United States with the assistance of a couple of S.A.S. pilots whom he had fleeced at poker in a New York dive. Instead of cash, he had suggested they give him a free ride to Denmark, which they duly did, spiriting him through customs and immigration when they landed. Did I by any chance, the Danish policemen inquired, happen to know where they could find my father? I didn't. And, thank God, I really didn't. I'd last heard of Ronnie a year earlier, when he had tiptoed out of Britain in order to escape a creditor or arrest or both.

So there was another lead for my detectives, I told them: let's find out what Ronnie was running away from in Britain, and why he had to get out of America the hard way, too. I told them about Ronnie's racehorses, which he kept going even when he was an undischarged bankrupt: horses in Newmarket, in Ireland, and at Maisons-Lafitte, outside Paris. I gave them the names of trainers and jockeys and told them how Lester Piggott had ridden for him while Lester was still an apprentice; and how Gordon Richards had advised him on his buying. And how I had once come upon young Lester in the back of a horse trailer, lounging in the straw in Ronnie's silks, reading a boys' comic before the race. Ronnie's racehorses were named after his beloved children: Dato, God help us, for David and Tony; Tummy Tunmers, which combined the name of his house with his affection for his own stomach; Prince Rupert—the only horse that showed any form—after my half brother Rupert; and Rose Sang, in arch reference to my half sister Charlotte's red hair. And how in my late teens I used to go to race meetings in Ronnie's stead after he had been warned off the course for not paying his gambling debts. And how when Prince Rupert to everyone's amazement took a place in—was it the Cesarewitch?—I returned to London on the same train as the bookies Ronnie hadn't paid, lugging a briefcase stuffed with banknotes from bets I'd placed for him around the course.

I told my detectives about Ronnie's Court, as I had always secretly called it: the motley of genteel ex-prisoners who formed the nucleus of his corporate family—ex-schoolmasters, ex-lawyers, ex-everything. And how one of them, called Reg, took me aside after Ronnie's death and tearfully gave me what he called the bottom line. Reg had done prison for Ronnie, he said. And he wasn't alone in that distinction. So had George-Percival, another courtier. So had Eric and Arthur. All four had taken the rap for Ronnie at one time or another, rather than see the Court robbed of its guiding genius. But that wasn't Reg's point. His point, David—through his tears—was that they were a bunch of bloody idiots who had let Ronnie con them every time. And they still were. And if Ronnie rose from his grave today and asked Reg to do another stretch for him, Reg would do it, the same as George-Percival and Eric and Arthur would. Because where Ronnie was concerned—and Reg was happy to admit this—the whole lot of them were soft in the head.

"We was all bent, son," Reg added in a last respectful epitaph to a friend. "But your dad was very, very bent indeed."

I told the detectives how Ronnie had stood as a Liberal parliamentary candidate for Great Yarmouth in the general election of 1950, taking the Court with him, Liberals to a man. And how the Conservative candidate's agent met Ronnie by appointment in a private place and, fearful that Ronnie was going to split the vote in Labour's favor, warned him that the Tories would leak his prison record and one or two other tidbits about him if he didn't stand down, which Ronnie, after consulting a plenary session of the Court, of which I was an ex-officio member, refused to do. Was Uncle Alec the Tories' Deep Throat? Had he sent them one of his secret letters exhorting them not to reveal the source? I have always suspected so. In any event, the Tories did exactly as they had threatened. They leaked Ronnie's prison record, and Ronnie as predicted split the vote and Labour won.

Perhaps by way of friendly warning to my detectives, or as a bit of a boast, I impressed upon them the extent of Ronnie's network of connections, and the lines he had to the most unlikely people. In the late forties and early fifties, his golden years, Ronnie could throw parties at his house in Chalfont St. Peter which included directors of the Arsenal football club, Permanent Under-Secretaries, champion jockeys, film stars, radio stars, snooker kings, ex-lord mayors of London, the entire cast of the Crazy Gang then playing at the Victoria Palace, not to mention a handpicked selection of lovelies from wherever he got them, and the Australian or West Indian Test cricket teams if they were visiting. Don Bradman came, and so did most of the great and good players of the postwar years. To which should be added a choir of leading judges and barristers of the day and a troop of ranking Scotland Yard police officers in off-duty blazers with crests on the pocket. Ronnie with his early education in police methods could spot a flexible copper a mile off. He knew at a glance what they ate and drank and what made them happy, how far they would bend and where they would snap. It was one of his pleasures to extend police protection to his friends, so that if someone's son, dead drunk, rolled his parents' Riley into a ditch, it was Ronnie who received the first frantic phone call from the child's mother, Ronnie again who waved his wand and caused the blood tests to be muddled in the police laboratory, to the profuse apologies of the prosecution for wasting Your Lordship's valuable time: with the further happy outcome that Ronnie notched up yet another favor to his account in the great Promise Bank where he kept his only assets.

In briefing my detectives I was, of course, beating the air. No detective on earth could have found what I was looking for, and two were no better than one. Ten thousand pounds and several excellent meals later, all they had to offer was a bunch of press clippings about old bankruptcies and the Great Yarmouth election and a pile of useless company records. No trial records, no retired jailers, no golden-bullet witnesses or smoking gun. Not a single mention of Ronnie's trial at Winchester Assizes, where by his own account he defended himself brilliantly against a young advocate named Norman Birkett, later Sir Norman, then Lord, who served as a British judge at the Nuremberg trials. From prison—this much Ronnie told me himself—he had written to Birkett, and, in the sporting spirit dear to both of them, congratulated the great barrister on his performance. And Birkett was flattered to receive such a letter from a poor prisoner who was paying his debt to society, and wrote back. And thus a correspondence developed in which Ronnie pledged his lifelong determination to study for the law. And as soon as he came out of prison he enrolled himself as a student at Gray's Inn. It was on the strength of this heroic act that he bought himself the wig and gown that I still see trailing after him in their cardboard box as he crisscrosses the globe in his search for El Dorado.

IN WHICH MY MOTHER, OLIVE, UNDERTAKES A CLANDESTINE OPERATION AND I AM PHOTOGRAPHED FOR THE EDIFICATION OF A DEAD WOMAN

My mother, Olive, crept out of our lives when I was five and my brother Tony was seven and both of us were fast asleep. In the creaking jargon of the secret world I later entered, her departure was a well-planned exfiltration operation, executed in accordance with the best principles of need-to-know security. She selected a night when my father, Ronnie, was billed to come home from London late or not at all. This was not hard. Fresh from the deprivations of prison, Ronnie had set himself up in business in the West End, where he was diligently making up for lost time. What kind of business we could only guess, but its rise had been mercurial. Ronnie had barely drawn his first breath of free air before he had gathered to himself the scattered nucleus of his Court. At the same dizzy speed, we abandoned the humble brick house in St. Albans to which my grandfather with much frowning and finger-wagging had conducted us upon Ronnie's release, and established ourselves in the riding-school-and-limousine suburb of Rickmansworth, less than an hour's drive from London's most expensive fleshpots. With the Court in attendance we had wintered in splendor at the Kulm Hotel, in Saint-Moritz. In Rickmansworth our bedroom cupboards were stuffed with new toys on an Arab scale. Weekends were one long adult revel while Tony and I persuaded riotous uncles to kick footballs with us, and gazed at the bookless walls of our nursery while we listened to the music from downstairs. Among the less probable visitors of those days was Learie Constantine, still arguably the greatest West Indian cricketer of all time. It is one of the many paradoxes of Ronnie's nature that he liked to be seen in the company of people of brown or black skin, which in those days made him a rarity. Learie Constantine played "French cricket" with us and we loved him dearly. I have a memory of a jovial domestic ceremony in which, without benefit of priest, he was formally inducted as my godfather.

"But where did the money come from?" I asked my mother at one of the many debriefings that attended our reunion. She had no idea. Business was either beneath her or over her head. The rougher it got, the further she stayed away from it. Ronnie was crooked, she said, but wasn't everyone in business crooked?

The house from which Olive made her covert exit was a mock-Tudor mansion called Hazel Cottage. In darkness, the long, descending garden and diamond-leaded windows gave it the appearance of a forest hunting lodge. I imagine a slim new moon, or none. All through the interminable day of her escape, I see her engaged in surreptitious preparations, filling her white hide Harrods suitcase with operational necessities—a warm pullover, East Anglia will be freezing; where in heaven's name did I leave my driver's license?—casting nervous glances at her Saint-Moritz gold watch while maintaining her composure toward her children, the cook, the cleaning woman, the gardener, and the German nanny Annaliese. She no longer trusts any of us. Her sons are Ronnie's wholly owned subsidiaries. Annaliese, she suspects, has been sleeping with the enemy. Olive's close friend Mabel lives only a few miles away with her parents in a flat overlooking Moor Park Golf Club, but Mabel is no more privy to the escape plan than is Annaliese. Mabel has had two abortions in three years after becoming pregnant by a man she refuses to identify, and Olive is beginning to smell a rat. In the mock-raftered drawing room as she tiptoes through it with her white suitcase stands one of the earliest prewar television sets, an upended mahogany coffin with a tiny screen that shows fast-moving spots and just occasionally the misted features of a man in a dinner jacket. It is switched off. Muzzled. She will never watch it again.

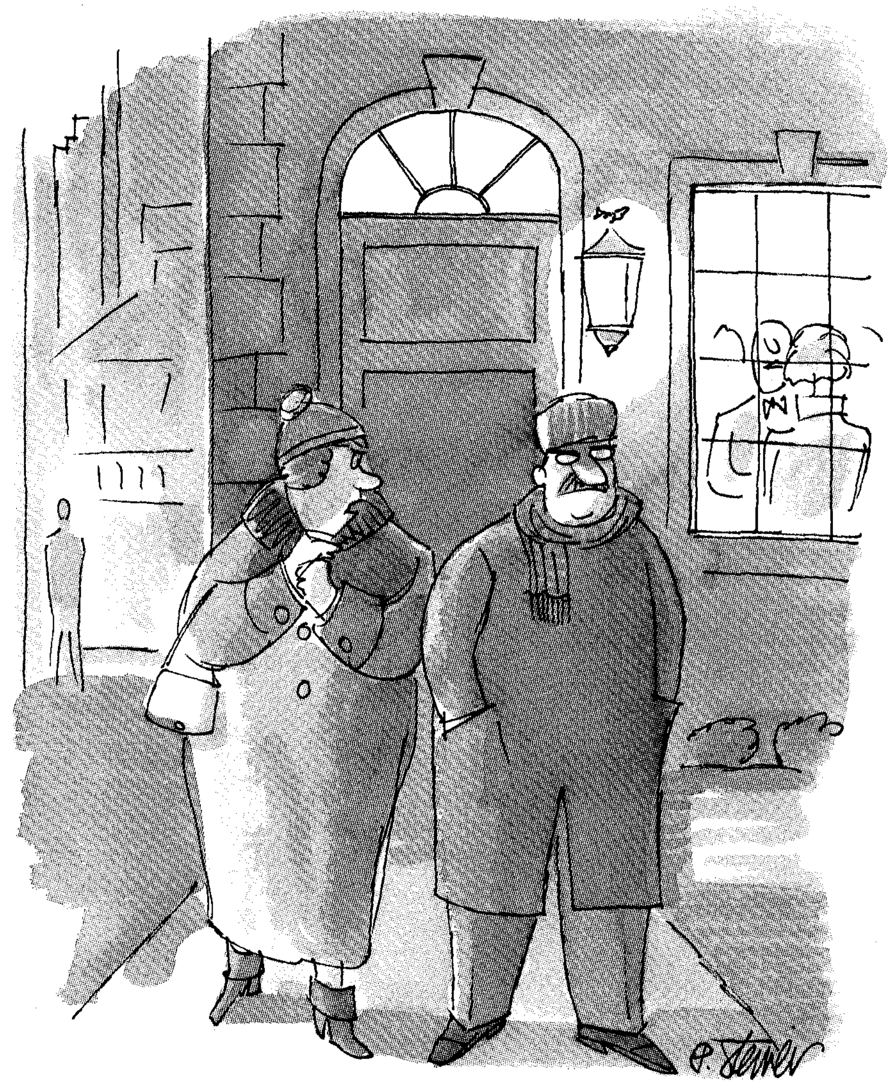
"Why didn't you take us with you?" I asked her at one debriefing.

"Because you'd have come after us, darling," Olive replied, meaning as usual not me but Ronnie. "You wouldn't have rested till you got your precious boys back."

Besides, she said, there was the all-important question of our education. Ronnie was so ambitious for his sons that somehow, more by crook than by hook but never mind, he would get us into classy schools. Olive would never have been able to manage that. Well, would she, darling? I can't describe Olive well. As a child, I didn't know her, and as an adult I didn't understand her. Whenever I start to write a female character, Olive always seems to get in the way, and I blame her for this, which is quite unfair.

The white hide suitcase sits today in my house in London and has become an object of intense speculation to me. As with all major works of art, there is tension in its immobility. Will it suddenly leap off again, leaving no forwarding address? Outwardly, it is a well-to-do bride's honeymoon suitcase with a good brand name. The two uniformed doormen who in my memory stand forever before the glass doors of the Kulm Hotel in Saint-Moritz, brushing the snow from guests' boots with a dramatic flourish, would immediately identify its owner as a member of the tipping classes. But when I am tired and my memory is out foraging for itself, the interior of the suitcase breathes a heavy sexuality. Partly, the tattered pink silk lining is the reason: a skimpy petticoat waiting to be ripped off. But there is also somewhere in my head a hazily remembered image of carnal flurry—of a bedroom skirmish I have intruded upon when I am very young—and pink is its color. Was this the time I saw Ronnie and Annaliese making love? Or Ronnie and Olive? Or Olive and Annaliese? Or all three of them together? Or none of them, except in my dreams? And does this pseudo memory portray some kind of childish erotic paradise from which I was shut out once Olive had packed her bag and left?

As a historical artifact, the suitcase is beyond price. It is the only known object that bears Olive's initials from her Ronnie period: O.M.C., for Olive Moore Cornwell, printed in black beneath the sweated leather handle. Whose sweat? Olive's? Or the sweat of her fellow-conspirator and rescuer, a gingery, irascible land agent who was also the driver of her getaway car? I have an idea that, like Olive, her rescuer was married, and, like Olive, had children. If that's so, were they, too, fast asleep? As the professional intimate of landed gentry, her rescuer also had class, whereas Ronnie in Olive's judgment had none. Olive never forgave Ronnie for marrying above himself. All through her later life, she hammered this theme, until I began to understand that Ronnie's social inferiority was the fig leaf of dignity which she clutched to herself while she continued to trail helplessly after him in the years of their supposed estrangement. She let him take her out to lunches in the West End, listening to his fantasized accounts of his prodigious wealth, though none of it ever reached



"What's with the Tim Russert act?"

her, and after the coffee and the brandy—or so I picture it—yielded to him in some safe house before he scurried off to run the world. By keeping open the wounds that Ronnie's low breeding had inflicted on her, by deriding to herself his vulgarities of speech and lapses of social delicacy, she was able to blame him for everything and herself for nothing, except her stupid acquiescence.

Yet Olive was anything but stupid. She had a witty, barbed, and lucid tongue. She was better grounded than Ronnie, if only because he had discharged himself a year early from grammar school in his impatience to score his first failure. Her long, clear sentences were print-ready, her letters cogent, rhythmical, and amusing. In computer-dating terms, it has always seemed to me, Ronnie and Olive were remarkably well matched. But while Olive was willing to be defined by whoever claimed to love her, Ronnie was a five-star con man endowed with the unfortunate gift of awakening love in men and women equally without feeling the smallest obligation to return it. Olive's resentment of my father's social origins did not stop at the principal offender. Ronnie's father—my own revered grandfather, Frank, ex-mayor of Poole, freemason, teetotaller, preacher, icon of our family probity, no less—was, according to Olive, as bent as Ronnie. It was Frank who had put Ronnie up to his first scam, had financed it, remote-controlled it, then kept his head down when Ronnie took the fall. She even found a bad word for Ronnie's *grandfather,* whom I remember as a white-bearded D. H. Lawrence lookalike riding a tricycle at ninety. Where on earth I was supposed to stand in this wholesale condemnation of our male line remained unsaid. But then I'd had the education, hadn't I, darling? I'd had the language and manners of respectable people beaten into me.

HOW THE ROTHSCHILDS CAME FACE TO FACE WITH CHURCHILL'S SECRET AGENT

One thing I'm pretty sure of is that there is no *development* to be traced in Ronnie's character, no illuminating moment you can put your finger on and say, From here on Ronnie was bent. All the evidence I ever heard suggests he was bent from the day he shook his first rattle. And, like a lot of born con men, he was a sucker, as gullible as those he conned and, after the event, as shocked as were his own victims by the baseness of his deceivers.

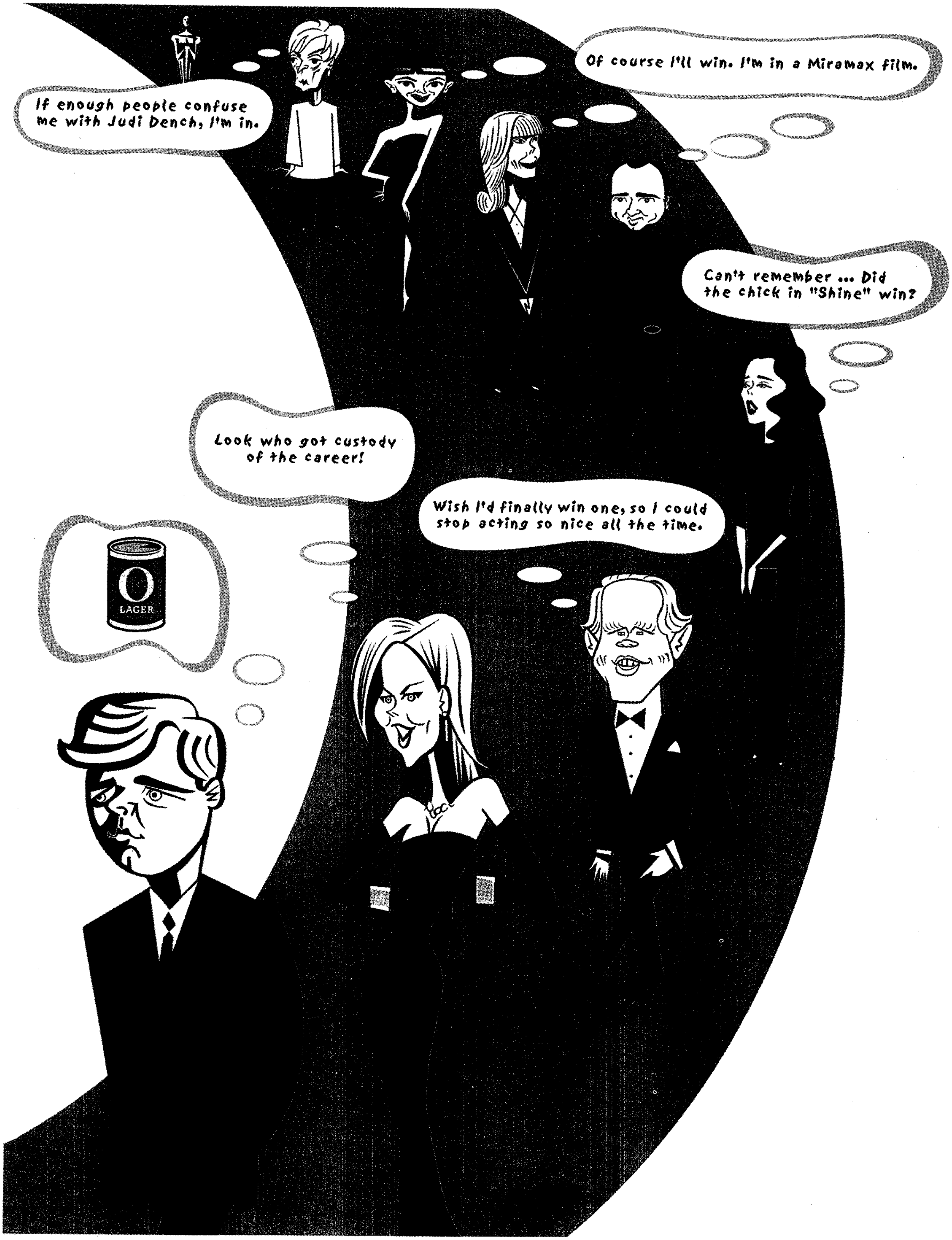
There were times when I looked on with awed disbelief as Ronnie bounced into the baited trap. A Middle European lady of some age came to him in great secrecy claiming to be the widow of a Rothschild baron who had perished under the Nazis. All she asked was Ronnie's assistance in moving a chest of priceless treasure across the Austrian border into Switzerland and selling it. The chest was in the hands of Roman Catholic priests, who had kept it hidden through the war. Among its treasures she included American gold dollars, a Gutenberg Bible, and a couple of rolled-up Old Master canvases, probably Rembrandts, I forget. If Ronnie could see his way to putting up a bit of seed money to bribe Swiss customs, paying off the Roman Catholic priests, and taking care of a few other trivial overheads, such as debts the poor woman had run up while she was locating the treasure and arranging to convey it to the border—in all a few thousands, nothing—he could have the use of the capital once the treasure had been turned to cash. The Baroness Rothschild wasn't greedy. Money didn't interest her. All she asked was a modest annuity; she would be guided by Ronnie as to how modest this should be. She wept.

Ronnie had summoned me from Oxford to London to listen to her story, which I duly did, and as soon as we were alone he asked me my opinion. I said the woman was a fraud and the story ludicrous. It is touching from this distance to reflect on the chivalry with which he rushed to the defense of a fellow-artist. I suggested he contact the Rothschild family in London or Paris and ask them to confirm that she was a genuine Rothschild widow. He would hear none of it. The poor woman was in hiding, living under a false name. The whole family was after that treasure, and they were after her blood as well. The important question was, how much was a Gutenberg Bible worth? And, when we had found that out, was I willing to put aside my studies and my cynicism for a few days and accompany the Baroness to Switzerland?

I was, I did. She was too good to miss. I escorted her first to Zurich, where she did a lot of shopping and charged everything to the hotel. Alone, I set off for the appointed border town, a godforsaken Alpine hamlet where it rained constantly. For two days I hung around the railway station waiting for the sight of Catholic priests laboring under the weight of a great chest. They would be accompanied by a mysterious intermediary called Amstler, who, according to the Baroness, was armed with a slice of Ronnie's slush fund. With more weeping, the Baroness had excluded herself from this moment of consummation. It was too risky. She could be recognized. They would stop at nothing. They hated her. Nobody appeared, and when I returned to Zurich the Baroness, too, had vanished, leaving only a trail of bills behind her. Ronnie never spoke of her again. The most he could manage was a martyred frown and a pious lowering of the eyes, indicating that human decency forbade comment.

In the same desperate year preceding his big bankruptcy, Ronnie also fell for the egregious Mr. Flynn. He was dreadfully thin, wild-eyed, unshaven, and of indeterminate middle age. He smelled of fox and dressed like a prisoner just released, in music-hall gray flannels and a sports jacket with overlong sleeves. On Ronnie's insistence he had come to live with us in Chalfont St. Peter—actually, for want of space, in my bedroom, in the spare bed alongside my own. Flynn here, Ronnie explained, at a family briefing attended by my reigning stepmother, myself, and a couple of courtiers, and of course Flynn himself, was a hero. We should tell nobody what we were about to hear. During the war Flynn had served in the most secret of all secret services: an unsung, tiny band of intrepid men and women who were under Winston Churchill's personal command. None of us sitting in this room—except Flynn, of course—would ever know what contribution Flynn had made to the Allied victory. Yet without him we might not be sitting here at all, and wasn't that right, Flynn? And Flynn, who had a rich Irish accent, was very pleased, and said yes, it was quite right. And Winston Churchill, who was then Prime Minister, wished to reward Flynn for his services, said Ronnie, but for obvious reasons couldn't do so publicly, and a medal was out of the question. So in two weeks' time, at a very private ceremony at Buckingham Palace,

BEAUTIFUL MINDS BY ROBERT RISKO AND ANDY BOROWITZ


If enough people confuse me with Judi Dench, I'm in.
Of course I'll win. I'm in a Miramax film.
Can't remember ... Did the chick in "Shine" win?
Look who got custody of the career!
Wish I'd finally win one, so I could stop acting so nice all the time.
O
LAGER

Russell Crowe, Nicole Kidman, Ron Howard, Jennifer Connelly, Kevin Spacey, Sissy Spacek, Audrey Tatou, and Maggie Smith.

to which Ronnie and a few other trusted friends of Flynn's were privileged to be invited, His Majesty *in person* was going to appoint Flynn to the very important and lucrative post of Consul General in Lisbon, after which Flynn would put Ronnie in the way of all manner of profitable business, thanks to the enormous influence of a British Consul General in the Portuguese capital. To which Flynn again gave his energetic assent, and we went to bed.

Or I did, but Flynn for that night and all the nights he remained with us wandered silently round my room in his borrowed pajamas as if pacing out his cell. Some mornings Ronnie took him up to London. There were Flynn's debts to pay off; Flynn had been down on his luck, poor chap, until dear old Winston had remembered him. There was a morning suit to be bought, not hired, because it would be needed in Lisbon, and a trousseau of decent suits, shirts, and underclothes because Flynn, as a secret hero, was too proud to ask for an advance of salary, and these diplomat fellows have to cut a dash when they're out there doing their stuff. Each night, with uncharacteristic regularity, Ronnie brought Flynn home again, and Flynn paced his cell and rubbed white powder on the back of his neck and whispered to himself in a rich, unintelligible Irish brogue.

After a week of this I took my courage in my hands and told Ronnie what I by now believed: that Flynn was barking mad. And Ronnie for the second time that year rebuked me for my cynicism and lack of faith. And the next week, when the due date finally arrived, Ronnie and Flynn drove up to London in their morning coats with their toppers on the back seat. What followed was relayed to me months later by way of Ronnie's consort of the time, who surprisingly had received his confession. Arriving in London, Flynn had disappeared in a taxi, explaining that he had to do something important before he went to the Palace to be honored. "Meet you there," he said. And that was the last Ronnie saw or heard of Flynn until the poor fellow was arrested a few weeks later on a string of charges that included, rather sadly, the theft of my Burberry raincoat from the house in Chalfont St. Peter.

While Flynn was off attending to his errand, Ronnie had sat for a couple of hours in his grand offices in Mount Street, running the world as usual. Then, clad in his morning suit, he had hailed a taxi and instructed it to go to Buckingham Palace. I am sure the moment pleased him hugely. Ronnie was always a great patriot and monarchist, and he loved to share his life with cabdrivers. On the journey, having sworn him to secrecy, he would have told the cabbie all about Flynn the hero and Winston Churchill and the private investiture that was about to take place. But as they entered the Mall the driver pointed out that there was no royal standard flying from the Palace roof. Even then, Ronnie refused to lose faith. If the investiture was private, he reasoned, then the King was wise to keep his presence quiet till it was over. The policeman at the Palace gates destroyed his last illusion. His Majesty was in Balmoral and was expected to remain there some time.

In retrospect, I am aware once again of some sense of failed kinship between him and his deceiver. It is Ronnie's eerie tolerance, not his disappointment, that fascinates. Like the Baroness, Flynn was a player, one of the breed. His fragility and striving were Ronnie's. In some muddled way, he was Ronnie's responsibility. When the chips were down, it was Ronnie and Flynn versus the world. Like Flynn, Ronnie didn't just con other people. He conned himself as well. So why should he see through another man's disguise if he couldn't see through his own? Here is an account by Colin Clark, son of Lord Clark, the great art expert and collector, of Ronnie in his golden years. It is taken from Colin's published autobiography:

> Ronnie was the best con-man ever. I had never seen anyone who looked so trustworthy in my life. He was your favourite uncle, your family doctor, Bob Boothby and Father Christmas all rolled into one. . . . Ronnie knew how to fix anything—tickets for the Cup Final, a box at Ascot, dinner at the most exclusive restaurant in town. He had an attractive wife, who hardly spoke but who obviously worshipped him. His accountant was perpetually on call to substantiate his claims to wealth and inside knowledge. . . .
>
> Ronnie invited me to Royal Ascot and gave me a few good dinners. Then he showed me a piece of derelict property, which he did not own, promised to double my money in three months, and took the lot. What was difficult to comprehend about Ronnie was that everything was fake. His office, his car, his chauffeur, his "regular" box at Ascot, were all just hired for the occasion, and never paid for. His wife was not his wife, and his accountant was just an accomplice. Only his powers of invention were real.

That's the only time I ever heard of Ronnie's using a woman as his witting accomplice. Otherwise, it's the same old story that I've heard a hundred times in different versions. There's the one about the elderly Countess in Vienna who is still waiting for her family portraits to be

"Archibald Monroe—I'll be heading Mr. Billing's transition team."

returned from Sotheby's, where Ronnie has sweetly arranged to have them cleaned and valued for her, free of charge. Or the distinguished lawyer from Buffalo who writes to me in tones of rueful admiration to describe how his entire partnership was put to work assessing the merits of a vast and innovative land-development scheme in Canada, and how he and his colleagues flew up there and spent happy days and a fortune in clients' money inspecting the site, talking to architects and surveyors and above all to Ronnie, sharing his great vision. Until, slowly and reluctantly, they realized that a vision was all it was. Ronnie owned nothing that he claimed, had no authority to sell, had none of the rights and permissions he professed to have obtained. The entire project was a pack of lies, a sting, a con from start to finish. The letter ends with the familiar refrain that the writer, like so many before and after him, would not have missed the experience for the world, and thank you.

A GREAT AMBASSADOR AND A GRAND HOTEL DEPRIVE RONNIE OF HIS GOLF CLUBS

Yet, at the close of each act in the tragicomedy that was Ronnie's life, the same question remains stubbornly unanswered: *Why*? What was the profit, the advantage, the product? What realistic hope could Ronnie have had—given also that he was laden with debt, on the run from Britain, and liable at any time to have his cover blown—of seeing his fantasy project signed, sealed, and delivered, and himself the triumphant winner on a white horse, riding away with his loot? First answer, in a word, none. The fun was here and now and there was no tomorrow. Immortals don't need one. Second answer, my preferred one, he was conning himself as well. He *believed* in Colin Clark's derelict property. He *believed* he was performing a priceless service for the elderly countess by taking her pictures off her. He *believed* in his vision of a great Canadian town fit for tomorrow's heroes. And if he'd thrown in the Eiffel Tower he'd have believed in that, too.

Or consider this. Tony and I, at around eighteen and sixteen, are eating our hearts out with boredom one summer holiday when Ronnie out of the blue suggests we give ourselves a week in Paris and have a bit of fun. This is a most unusual proposal coming from Ronnie, since it implies the provision of hard cash. However, he insists, and gives us real folding money for our fares, and tells us that we can pick up whatever more we need from the Panamanian Ambassador to France, a first-class fellow to whom Ronnie has been shipping bottles of unbranded Scotch whisky under diplomatic protection. The Ambassador, he explains, unpacks the bottles in his cellar, sticks on whatever brand labels he thinks appropriate, and ships them to Panama, again under diplomatic protection. The scheme has been running nicely for some while, so it follows that there is a pot of money waiting to be collected. In the same mood of generosity, Ronnie declares that we can spend the first fifty pounds of it. The Ambassador and his glamorous wife receive us with full diplomatic honors and give us dinner and a fine time, but no money. Why should he give us money, he argues charmingly, when Ronnie owes him a small fortune? What Ronnie has not mentioned to us, apparently, is that the Ambassador has paid Ronnie up front for the unbranded whisky, and is still waiting for the first consignment. We apologize and leave. Was the Ambassador telling the truth? Or was he conning back? In those days I wasn't sufficiently trained to form a view. I'm still not.

Next day we attempt to perform Ronnie's second little errand: *Pop round to the George V hotel, you fellows, which is one of the best pubs you'll ever see the inside of, have yourselves a drink in the bar, shoulder to shoulder with some of the most beautiful women in the world, give my love to dear old Louis*—or Henri, or whatever the head concierge was called—*slip him a tenner from the money you've collected from the Ambassador, and bring back the golf clubs they're looking after for me until my next visit.* Thanks to the Ambassador's obduracy, we have no tenner for Louis or Henri, but I don't think it would have made much difference if we had. We state our business to the concierge, he presses a bell, a manager appears from behind an invisible door. "No golf clubs until your father's bill is paid." He adds sourly that a hundred sets of golf clubs wouldn't cover it. For a bad moment he even seems to wonder whether he can impound the two of us as well. But he doesn't, or we bolt before he can, to spend three penniless days with the clochards on the banks of the Seine, eating baguettes and drinking foul red wine by the litre.

There were real victims, that's the trouble. Real blood on the carpet. Real wrecked lives and broken hearts, and I'm not talking about love. Tony and I ran another little errand for Ronnie that year and remember it with shame. The mark this time was not, unfortunately, a dubious Panamanian Ambassador or a wealthy property lawyer or the presumed heir to a great art fortune but an elderly couple who lived across the road from us in Chalfont St. Peter. Sir Eric had recently retired from a distinguished career as a civil servant in India, and was therefore a stranger to the country he had represented for so long. Ronnie's instructions to us, barked by telephone from London, were to *get yourselves over to Sir Eric's house now and tell him everything's all right.* How all right? we asked. *All right, for God's sake! Don't shilly-shally! Tell him if he kicks up a stink he'll spoil everything. It's all going to be all right. The check's on its way.* And with profound reluctance we went, and drank their sherry, and did our feeble best to vouch for Ronnie's integrity while Sir Eric and his Lady peered at us with terrified disbelief. "We're living on our pension," Sir Eric explained, as to children, "and a little bit of capital my wife inherited. We've given them to your father to invest." Then the killer question: Could we assure them that Ronnie, from everything we knew of him, could be trusted with their savings? I don't remember what I said. Perhaps I didn't do the talking. Tony did. We made several trips across the road. Sometimes one of us would go, and sometimes both, until finally we told Ronnie we couldn't go again.

"Forgiven your father yet?" the beady Head of Personnel at MI5 asks me on the day I take up employment in his service.

"Oh, long ago, sir," I reply, with Ronnie's angelic smile.

And that's another thing I've inherited from him: the mask of sanity.

How Ronnie broke the news to us of Olive's nocturnal flight from the mock-Tudor house in Rickmansworth is a mystery. I have no recollection of mourning her except on the odd occasion when Tony and I found ourselves in some particularly lonely situation and on a shared impulse commiserated with each other. My guess is that Ronnie didn't so much announce her disappearance as leak it, then trivialize it, then treat it as water under the bridge. She was ill—that much Ronnie must have told us, because I paid her regular visits in a sunlit hospital, where she sat upright in a ward all to herself, wearing an angora cardigan. But Olive, under interrogation, denied she had been ill at all during this period. And she had *never* possessed an angora pullover: "I wouldn't, darling, they tickle." Next the rumor—from Ronnie or a planted subsource—that she had fallen into immoral ways. *Never judge, son. That's God's job, not ours. Know what it says in the Bible? Forgive and love her.* Forgive and, by implication, forget. And certainly there would have been a great deal of weeping. Ronnie could weep at the drop of a hat, or no hat at all. On his side of the family we all can, but Ronnie was in a class of his own.

Then gradually she must have died, perhaps of injuries sustained in her immoral ways. Not formally dead. Not life extinct. Like all good spin doctors, Ronnie didn't trade in unretractable statements. First would have come the heavy tabernacle silence, while we metaphorically settle in our pews and remember we're in God's house, except that it belongs to some luckless bank. Then a shaking of the head and a sufferer's forbearing sigh. "Those medical boys, son, they just won't give it to a fellow straight," he might have begun, but with enough martyrdom in the voice, and enough bravely concealed pain, for you to wonder whether he was worse hit than she was. Until, bit by bit, after a few more coded statements from the pulpit, it would have been understood that not just Ronnie but all three of us were victims of the same misfortune, into which Olive's illness, immorality, and death-or-its-equivalent had projected us.

And here, I guess, he would have seized his chance, and delivered the sum of all the multiple equations that had been whirring inside his head since the scene had begun. As a consequence of which, he would continue—we are still weeping, you understand, still locked in a triple bear hug where every choked statement flows inexorably from the last—Tony and I must go immediately to boarding school with the aim of becoming great lawyers, exactly as Ronnie himself will be a great lawyer, just as soon as he can take time off from running the world, because one day we'll be Cornwell, Cornwell & Cornwell, the greatest family team of lawyers and pals that ever graced God's Chancery Lane. And gradually it turns out that Ronnie has already had a quiet word with the headmaster of St. Martin's School, Northwood, who's a first-class chap, and a great golfer, and keen as mustard for us to get this thing behind us and start on the long hard road of duty, never mind it's the middle of the term, he'll take you.

In the course of a posthumous search of Olive's humble cottage, I came upon a second artifact as significant in its way as the white hide suitcase, and as poignant. It hangs beside me as I write, a wedding photographer's portrait of Tony and me, aged seven and five, dressed in the uniform of St. Martin's boarding school for boys. It was taken, I suspect, on or before our first day as new entrants to the boarding-school gulag. We are posed in a studio, on a piece of fake garden wall. In our false smiles you may read, as I do, some kind of bracing for the ordeal that lies ahead. Do we look bereaved? Not to me we don't, but children are the greatest liars on earth when it comes to concealing their emotions. The historian's interest in the photograph, however, will rest less with the subjects' faces than with the inscription in the lower right corner, where each has penned a greeting to Olive in painstaking handwriting done with a relief nib in India ink. "Love from Tony" in his hand and "love from david," with a small "d," in mine. No date.

You will take the point at once. If we are on our way to the gulag and Olive is missing and believed dead, what in the name of heaven do we think we are up to, sending her our love?

Do I recall posing for the photograph? I do. I had never before ventured into a photographer's lair or sat under studio lighting. How could I forget feeling like a film star for the first time? Do I recall signing the photograph? I do not. Then why not? When I fished it out of its dark drawer in Olive's cottage, where it was in such good condition that I suspect it had spent its life there, did I not have an immediate sense of recognition? So if I remember the photograph why do I have no memory of signing a message of love on it to my missing mother, of all people, to my ill-immoral-dead Olive, from david with a small "d," on the day when, thanks to her, he disappeared into the gulag, not to emerge for eleven years?

Unless of course I didn't sign it. Unless Ronnie, reluctant to revive in our minds the awkward question of Olive's whereabouts, spared us the bother and did our signing for us. There is collateral for this assumption. When Ronnie, some fifteen years later, staged his biggest public failure—it was the early nineteen-fifties, the sum in contention a million and a quarter pounds—several documents that bore my signature, in my capacity as an officer of one of his eighty-something worthless companies, came under legal scrutiny. But I didn't remember signing the documents, or accepting a post in any of his companies. Whether I told the receiver this, or lied to protect Ronnie, I simply forget. Certainly I told him that I had agreed to accept a retainer of four hundred pounds a year from a company called, as it were, Legal & David Investments Limited, in exchange for my written promise not to sell my services to any other firm. Ronnie had explained to me that this was a perfectly normal method for a respectable law company such as Legal & David to finance the studies of an up-and-coming future partner.

But I was past twenty by then. Thanks to the blessings of Britain's compulsory national service, I had spent two years as an officer of military intelligence, which, as the saying goes, has as much to do with intelligence as military music has to do with music. All the same, I had taken to heart Ronnie's lessons in duplicity, and adapted them to my own ends. Ronnie still believed I intended to read law, but I knew I had enrolled myself for modern languages. And though I was not aware of the impulse until I gave way to it, I was on the verge of the most subversive act yet in my covert campaign to undermine Ronnie's absolute power: writing to my dead mother, care of Uncle Alec.

IN WHICH I SERVE A LONG PRISON SENTENCE FOR MY FATHER AND EXPIATE CRIMES I HAVE NOT COMMITTED

If there's one thing above others that English letters can do without, it's another dreary account of the horrors of an expensive private British education,

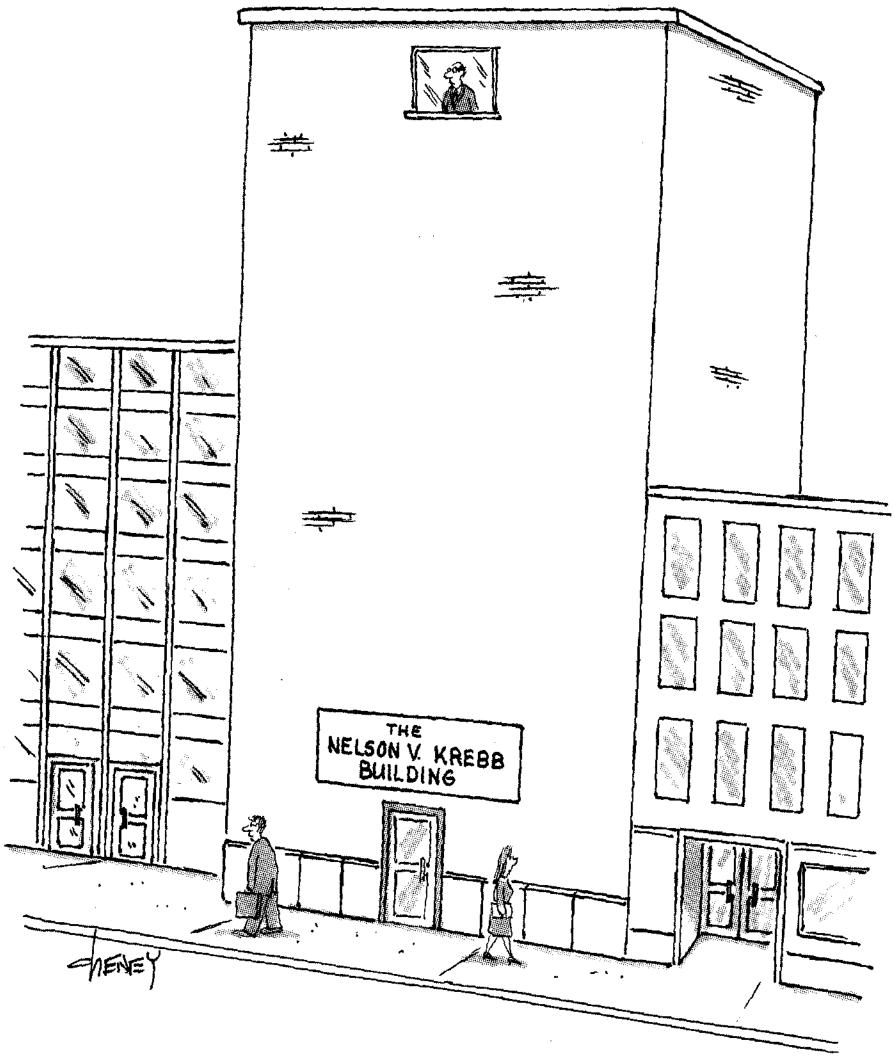
Your wife will sleep with you now.
HOME OFFICE MANAGER
Shanahan

• •

the indelible scars that a neo-fascist regime of corporal punishment and single-sex confinement inflicts upon its wards, and the warping effect of all this on the body psychic of the British ruling classes down the ages. I will refer you instead to Lindsay Anderson's film "If . . .," which might as well have been shot at my public school as his, and to the wealth of distressing literature, from Cyril Connolly's "Enemies of Promise" to Paul Watkins's "Stand Before Your God."

Anthony Trollope tells us that his boyhood was "as unhappy as that of a young gentleman could well be," but I'll bet he didn't set up as a young gentleman at the age of five, and, besides, I wasn't a gentleman. I didn't know the language or the taboos; everyone looked to me like a grownup from another country. Of St. Martin's I remember little but the harrowing daily routine of bed-making, clothes-changing, and bell-ringing, and the extraordinary kindness of my brother Tony, who appeared from nowhere to scoop me up, brush the grime off me, and set me back on my feet. At both my early schools, Tony took on the job of proxy father, and for that matter mother, also, for the schools offered little in the way of Olive substitutes. From time to time, Ronnie would announce himself for a leave-out day. Mostly he didn't show up, I assume because he didn't want to be pestered about our fees. When he did come, he would bring his latest candidate for Olive's job and a member of his Court for protection. Lunch would be a three-hour affair with a lot of brandy, which at that age we didn't drink. At some point before the treat ended, we knew he was going to take us aside and ask us what we thought of the candidate, and we were going to reply "not much." For the times when he didn't appear as advertised, Tony and I developed a contingency plan. We would wait as ordered at the end of the long school drive, where Ronnie reckoned he was less likely to be spotted by the school bursar than if he rolled up to the main building. Having given him an hour or so, we would take ourselves for a long walk. "Had a good day, Cornwell?" "Super, sir, thank you." "Parents O.K.?" "Fine, sir, thank you." And so to bed.

Then an awful day came when Tony went on to his public school thirty miles away and I was left behind at St. Martin's. So at weekends we each bicycled the fifteen-odd miles to an agreed meeting point and pooled whatever bits of food we had saved up during the week. Then I, too, left for a public school, called Sherborne, where I spent the worst three years of the seventy I have so far lived. My escape took place of its own accord when I was sixteen. Unlike Olive, I made no clandestine preparation. A term ended, the school train puffed out of Sherborne station bound for Waterloo, and as I watched the


THE NELSON V. KREBB BUILDING
CHENEY

town's skyline disappear I realized quite undramatically that I would never again see the place as a schoolboy. It was time to move on, and it was definitely time to get away from Ronnie.

IN WHICH I AM TALENT-SPOTTED FOR THE MONASTIC LIFE AND CHASTISED BY AN AUSTRIAN NIGHT PORTER

How I got out from under Ronnie, if I ever did, is the story of my life. Falling out of love with your father is like falling out of love with anyone else. The body count just gets too high. There was Sir Eric, there were more Sir Erics. There was Ronnie's own family, who, after his father's death, he robbed rotten. There was Sherborne, and a lot of spotty adolescence and moral posturing—my own—and being told by my deeply religious housemaster that I had to choose between God and the Devil. (For Devil, read Ronnie.) To swing my vote he steered me toward a whispering Anglican Franciscan monk called Algy, whose mission was to win public-school souls for the monastic life. In my recollection, Algy is the Christian equivalent of the secret Communist recruiters who threw their net over the likes of Kim Philby in the thirties. Under his feline prompting, I signed up for a series of excruciating three-day retreats on a beautiful Dorset hillside, where I mouthed plainsong, breathed incense, and tried to feel holy by eating bread and water while the Father Guardian read aloud from Lord Halifax's "Fullness of Days" in a penitential growl. The brightest bit was looking after Brother Kentigern's white rabbits, till I discovered they were being bred for gloves. The Father Guardian, who had been briefed in advance about Ronnie, must have been a specialist in moral mayhem, because he told me he was in the habit of crossing the Atlantic to hear the confession of James Thurber. He said it took him the whole return trip to recover. He also told me to endure Ronnie as a sacrifice, which infuriated me. But what did I want him to tell me? Go home and brain him with a golf club? I've no idea, and probably I had none at the time.

Then there was Gordon, who in my imagining, if nowhere else, was the super-victim of all Ronnie's misadventures. I will pretend his name is Jones. Under yet other names he has appeared repeatedly in my novels. He's the shabby, grinning, very English one with the forelock and the scuffed suède shoes, mumbling platitudes and doing brave things for honor. But in the real world, as near as I can get to it, he was Gordon Jones, aged about forty, an apologetic, sandy-haired, upper-class remittance man down on his luck, who had attached himself to Ronnie like a lost dog. The reason soon became clear to me. Ronnie had cleaned him out, but Gordon was in denial. He loved Ronnie, and believed that if he hung around him, somehow things would right themselves. But they didn't. He appointed himself a member of the Court, ran Ronnie's errands, placed bets for him, lied for him, and was a welcome house guest for weekends on the trot. But still things didn't come right. And one day Gordon did a truly awful thing. He got himself a lady of the night and took her to a grand hotel—Claridge's, the Ritz, one of those—and signed them both in as Sir Gordon and Lady Jones. He ordered a great meal, great wines, the best of everything. And sometime in the early hours he sent the girl home and shot himself or took poison—I'm not sure which. Either way, he was dead, though it was a long time before I was allowed to know this, because whereas Gordon had been *dear old Gordon, a first-class chap and the salt of the earth even if he's a bit too fond of the bottle,* he had suddenly joined the unmentionables who had lost faith. Except that Gordon had lost more than faith.

And after Gordon there was my mission to Saint-Moritz. And come to think of it, yes: if there has to be one moment or one place where my love affair with Ronnie hit the rocks, Saint-Moritz gets the prize, even if it's a little hard to weep warm tears for a Swiss hotelier. I was sixteen and, in order to escape the ludicrous disparity between life at Sherborne and life with Ronnie, I had enrolled as a student of German philology at Berne University, in Switzerland. Sometimes Ronnie sent money, but not often, so I took odd jobs, lived small, and shared my landlady's salami. One day, Ronnie phoned: *Son, I've got a job for you.* It was the Sir Eric mission all over again, but this time the victim was the scion of one of Switzerland's most famous hotelier families, the Badrutts of Saint-Moritz.

Now, Saint-Moritz was holy ground for Tony and me. Before the war, we had wintered there with Olive for the only family holiday we ever shared with her, and we had the photographs to prove it. After the war, Ronnie had returned there in triumph, bringing with him a riotous group of jockeys and other sportsmen and sportswomen, several members of the Court, their friends, and their friends' friends—bring them all, the more the merrier, just sign the bill, because Ronnie, who loved the Badrutts and the Swiss and the good people of Saint-Moritz particularly, had decided to help them out of their post-war economic doldrums. To hell with British currency restrictions—let everyone settle his hotel bill with Ronnie, who out of the goodness of his heart would accept their English checks and act as a clearing house for the hotel, even if it cost him time and inconvenience. And my job—thus Ronnie once more—was to explain to dear old Toni Badrutt (or was it Caspar, I forget), who was a first-class chap, that the obstacles to passing on the money to him were proving a little more resistant than had been originally anticipated, but that everything was now in hand or, given a fair wind, soon would be. *And while you're there, son, have yourself a steak on your old man.*

So I went to Saint-Moritz, and saw Olive's ghost everywhere, although it was summer. And I stammered out my lines to Mr. Badrutt, who was too courteous, and perhaps by now too wise, to do other than thank me for my good offices and tell me the time of the next train back to Berne, because he didn't know I'd had to hitchhike.

It's the late sixties and at Ronnie's urgent request I have flown to Vienna, where I am giving him lunch in the Sacher. No, I tell him, I will not invest in this surefire property he's got his eye on. I will not invest in any of his schemes, now or ever. All I am willing to do is pay his landlord and his food bills and give him something for his daily living expenses. It is what a father might say to an errant son, and perhaps it is what Ronnie's father should have said to Ronnie. Either way, it is enough to cause him to collapse sobbing on the table in full view of the waiters and other diners, until I am able to haul him sweating and heaving along the corridor to the front entrance because *all I want is a cab, son, just put me in a cab and go back to your wealth and family and all the advantages I gave you.* So I help him into the cab and he lowers the window and we weep at each other while he asks me whether I can spare a fiver for the fare.

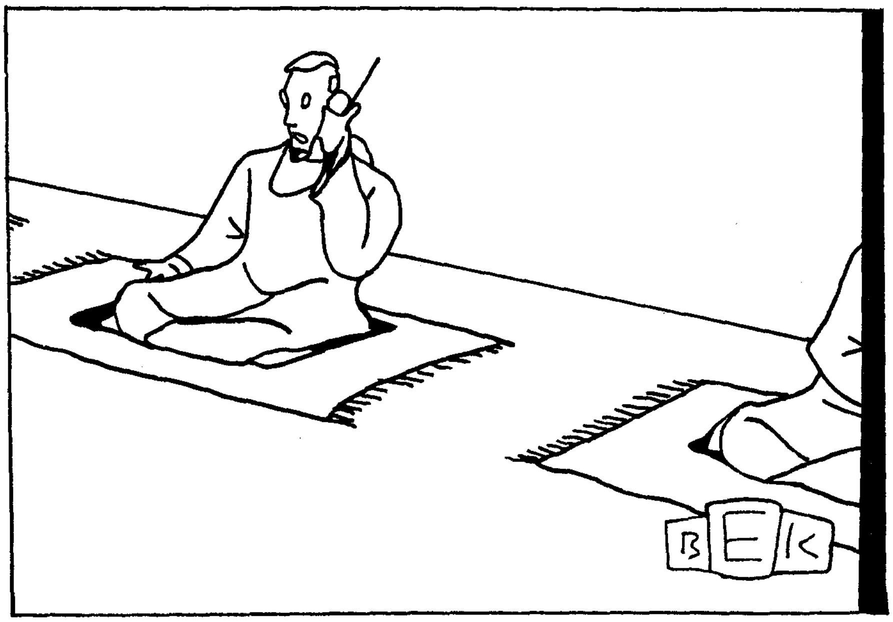
It is the early seventies, and I am in London and have just delivered the typescript of a new novel. Tradition provides that my wife, Jane, take me to lunch at the Savoy as a reward, for I have inherited Ronnie's affection for grand hotels. We are drinking a glass of champagne by way of an apéritif when Ronnie walks up to us wearing a new dark suit by Mr. Berman's successor, handmade shoes and shirt, looking like a cherubic off-duty cardinal.

"What the hell are you doing in the Restaurant, son? You should be in the Grill—it's far better. Come and join us."

I explain the occasion. All the same, we agree to join him for a drink. His guests are a middle-aged couple from Ronnie's home town of Poole. The husband looks like the sidesman from all the Baptist tabernacles that I attended with my grandparents while Ronnie was doing time. The wife wears floury face powder and a warm smile, no lipstick. It seems they own *a fine piece of land overlooking the sea, son,* and are hoping for a spot of free advice about how best to develop it. Beside them sits a bottle of Dom Pérignon, in an ice bucket. It so happens that Jane and I have settled for the house brand, sold by the glass.

It's a few years later, Ronnie is dead, and I am revisiting Vienna in order to breathe the city air while I write him into a semi-autobiographical novel. Not in the Sacher again; I have a dread that the waiters will remember us. My plane into Schwechat is delayed, and the reception desk of the small luxury hotel that I have chosen at random is in the charge of an elderly night porter. He looks on silently as I fill in the registration form. Then he speaks in soft, venerable Viennese German.

"Your father was a great man," he says. "You treated him disgracefully." ♦



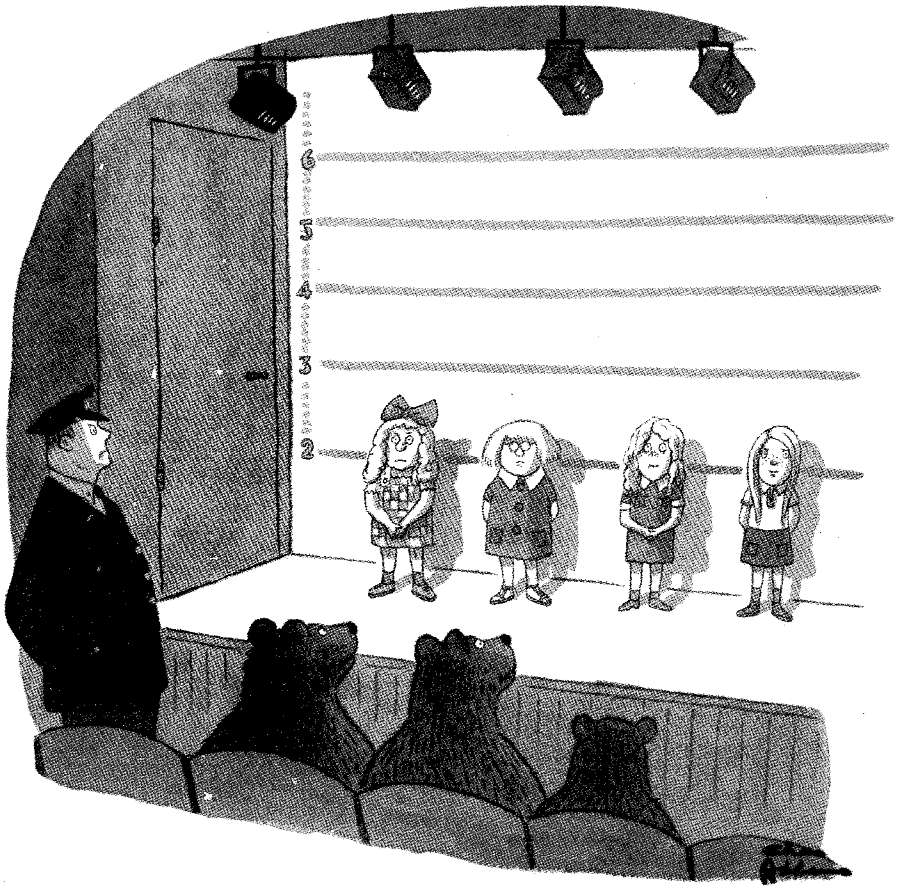
"I'm crazed with this noble path—let me get back to you."

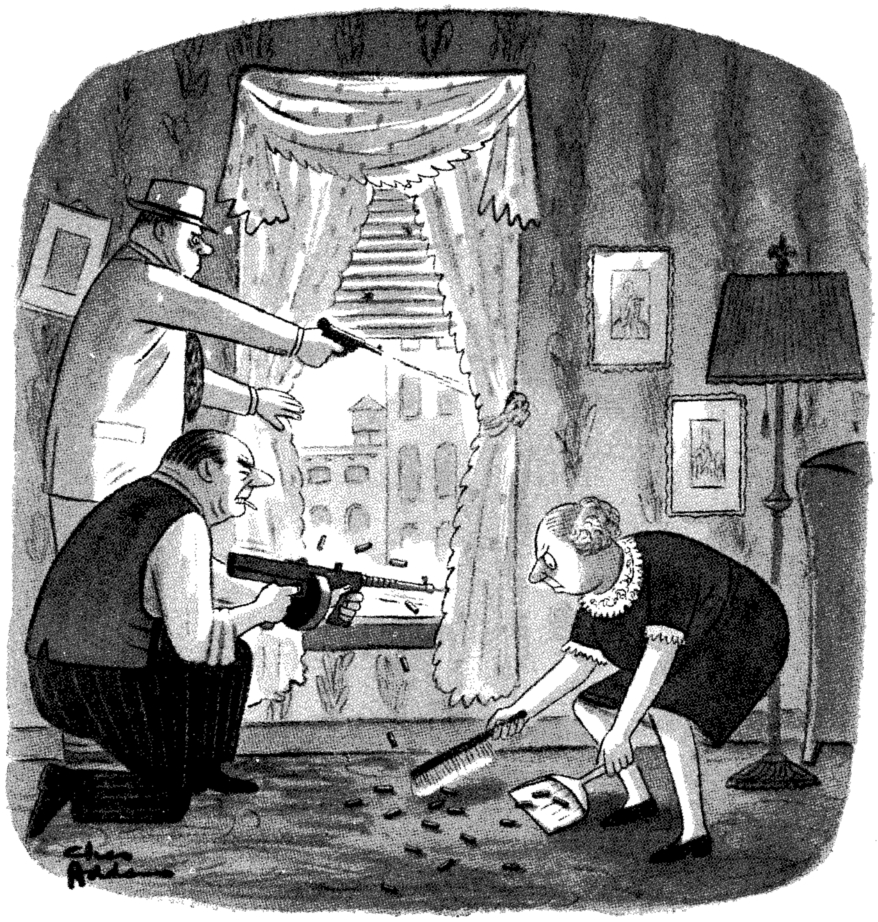
FROM THE ARCHIVES

TEN-YEAR-OLD MAKES GOOD

It's been almost fifteen years since Charles Addams took his leave, but reopening his enormous lifetime album shortens the distance right away. Visiting his patented array of heartwarming ghouls and overworked witch doctors, delightful crypts and one-eyed space tots; his interesting funerals, bulging pythons, and gentle executioners—all set forth in clear, masterly dark washes—brings joy without complication. The laughs are here, as always, but what comes with them is the vivifying sense of a world seen with the anarchic clarity and creepy, hopeful imagination of a bright ten-year-old: ourselves at our first and worst. If his genius is missed in the magazine, it is for this kid's-eye notion that absolutely anything can happen next, the instant it crosses our mind. What if a man comes home and finds a twelve-foot-long overcoat on the front-hall coat hanger? What if you get to the fifth green and see a tiny ladder going down into the cup, with a "Men Working" sign beside it? Wouldn't a thoughtful witch serve her cat a ladleful of boiling-toad soup from her cauldron? Did a pair of unicorns, arriving late, just miss the ark? Hey, what sort of pets live in a haunted house?

For millions of the middle-aged, Addams will always be remembered as the originator of "The Addams Family" on television (and the competing "Munsters" show), which was developed from the inhabitants he'd conceived to fill the cobwebbed and happily haunted Victorian mansion in his cartoons. It was no great trick to convert this vivid cast into Morticia, Uncle Fester, and Lurch, and—given a laugh track and some strong script writers—to keep the original joke alive for two years, plus another thirty-five in reruns and spinoffs. The deal made Addams a rich man, and I don't think he felt much regret when the hyped





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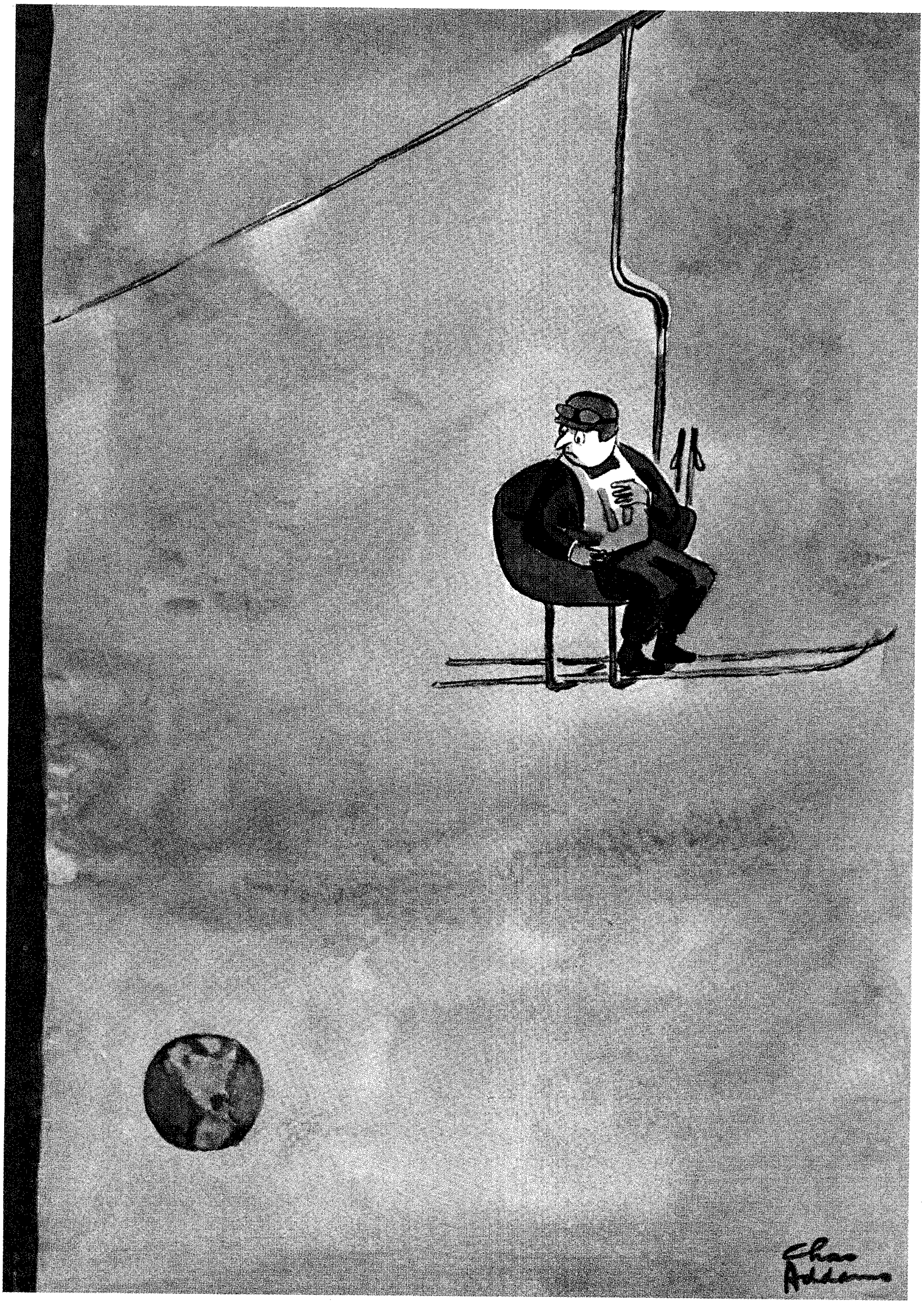
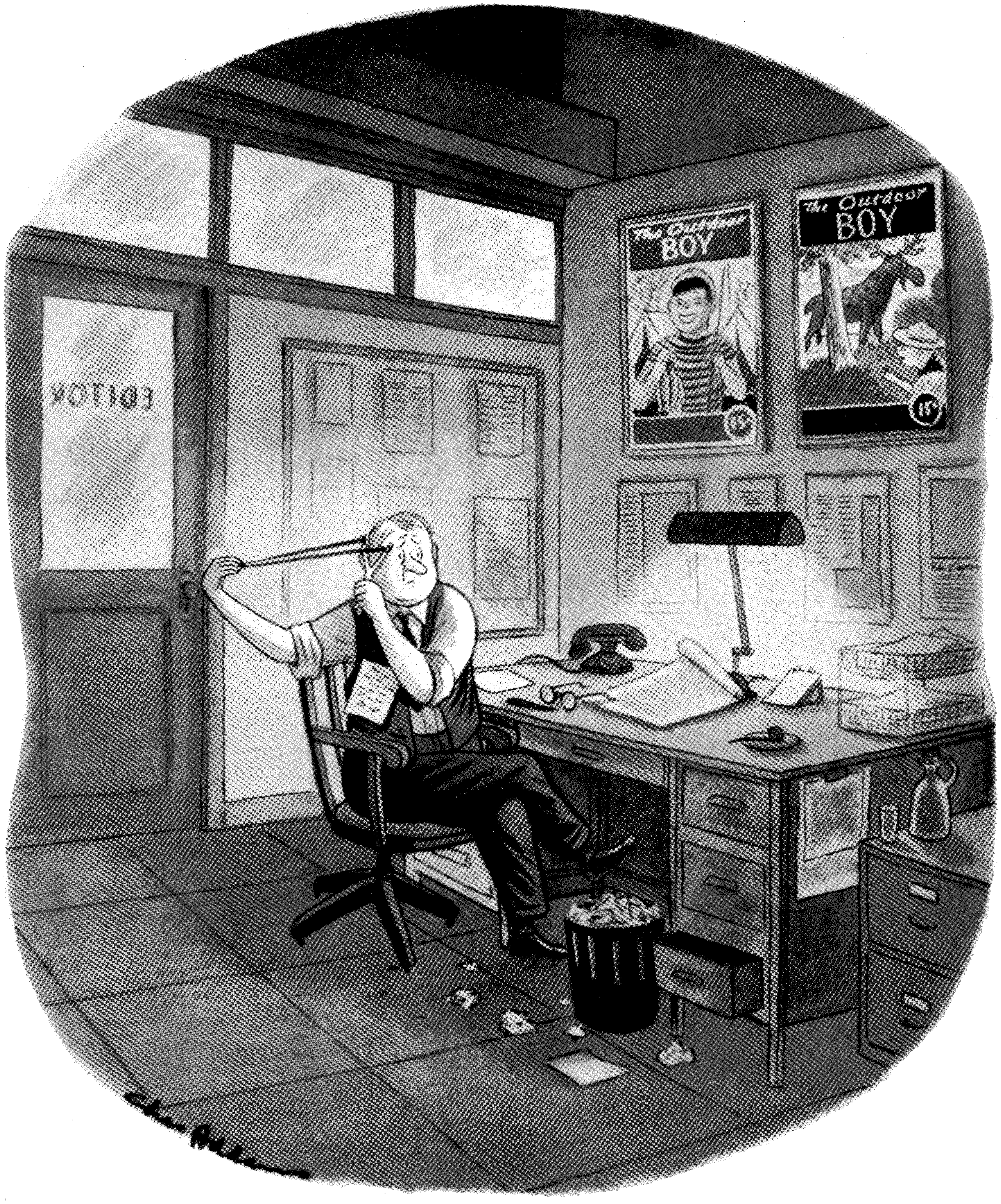

Chas Addams



mannerisms and fading freshness of a long-running series came to replace the edge of his originals, and their artistry. His friends looked on this outcome with a shrug: that's the way it goes, and good for you, Charlie. He had friends by the carload, who were drawn to his tall, semi-silent elegance and attentive ear. If you could drop a fox terrier or a Rolls-Royce Phantom II or a back-road route to Hyde Park into the conversation, he'd light up, and the odd passing sense that you'd been looking at an Addams rendering of Addams would go away.

He kept on drawing, and it is the drawings that hold up, in their perfect innocence and surprise: This ski lift has lifted off for Uranus. Four nasty-looking Goldilocks suspects face the music in a police lineup, for the Three Bears. There goes Mom, bending over again to sweep up the cartridges during another shootout, and the dorky editor of *The Outdoor Boy* is about to off himself with a slingshot. We've missed the 12:38 to Bridgeport but somehow found a seat on the Orient Local instead. Lucky us.

—*Roger Angell*

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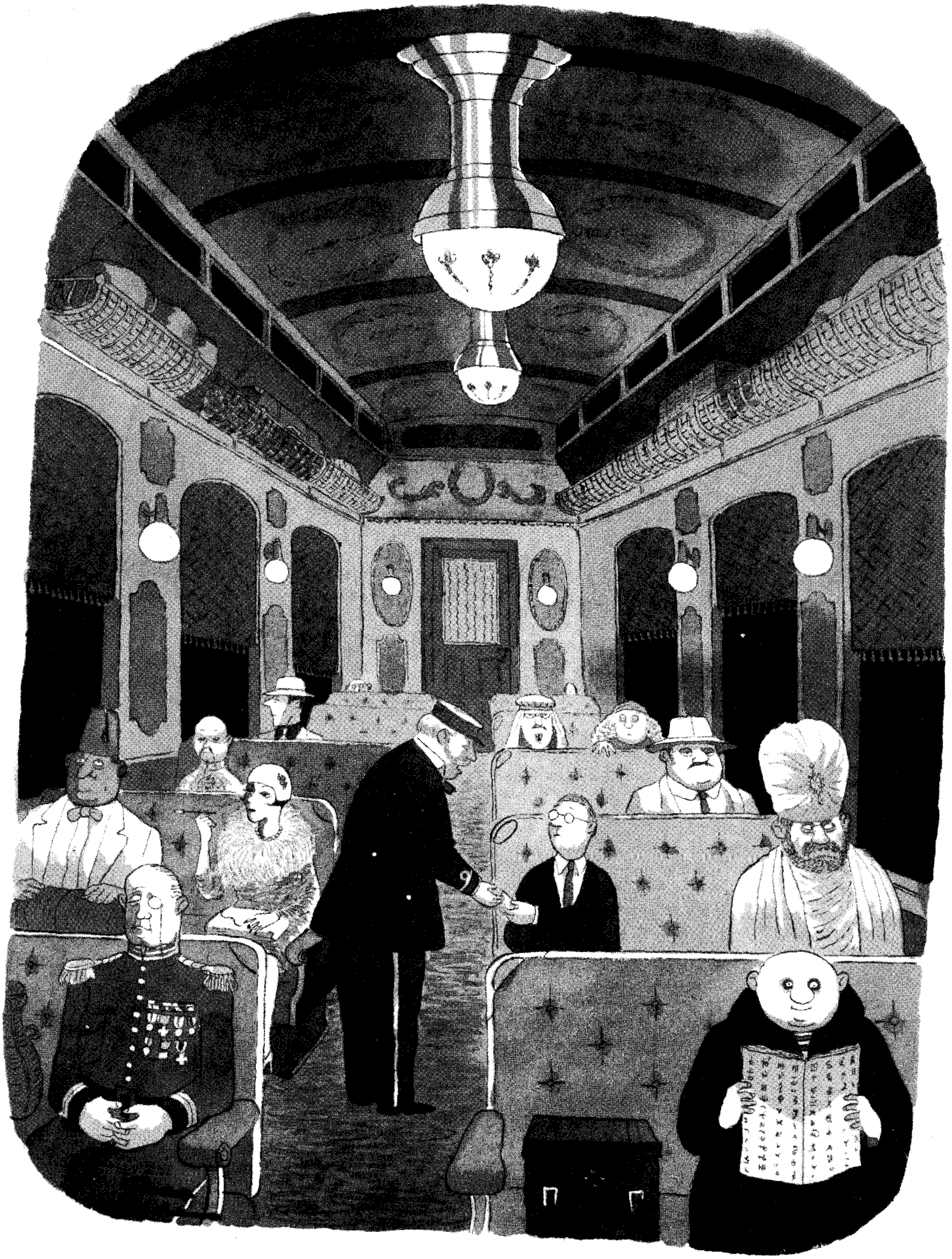


"No, this is not the 12:38 to Bridgeport."

PROFILES

THE PEOPLE'S PREACHER

Al Sharpton would rather walk naked than wear your wretched dress.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

The Reverend Al Sharpton knows that you do not take him seriously. Racism is like that. A man can win eighty per cent of the black vote, and still white people will question whether he really represents anyone. This is an outrage, and also a matter of no small personal satisfaction.

Nearly two decades have passed since Sharpton first made his appearance on the New York political scene and was dubbed by Ed Koch "Al Charlatan." In that time, there is hardly a form of contempt that he hasn't elicited; he has been variously condemned as a hustler, a demagogue, a symbol of all that is wrong with race relations in America, and a stupid joke. To the extent that the criticism has been damaging, it has not been to Sharpton—a pattern whose implications his critics, even today, seem unable fully to grasp. Just this past fall, a series of cartoons ran in the *Post* showing Sharpton in an assortment of poses with then Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer. One of the cartoons pictured Ferrer, who was hoping, with Sharpton's support, to become the Democratic mayoral nominee, perched, Charlie McCarthy-like, on Sharpton's knee; another depicted the two at the altar, Ferrer in a wedding dress, Sharpton bursting out of a tuxedo. Ultimately, one of the cartoons found its way onto a campaign flyer for Ferrer's Democratic rival, Mark Green; it showed Sharpton presenting a blimp-sized rear end to Ferrer's puckered lips amid clouds of what can only be assumed to be flatulence. Chaos ensued. Democratic leaders lined up to mollify Sharpton, among them Bill Clinton, who spent the night before the general election driving around midtown Manhattan in a vain attempt at mediation. The whole mess probably cost Green the mayoralty, but, more important, as far as Sharpton was concerned, it provided new material.

"Blacks and Latinos made a statement this year that plantation politics is over," he announced to much applause in Harlem a few days after the election. "We may have a bad date with Michael Bloomberg, but I'm not going to be the battered wife for the Democratic Party. That's what battering husbands do: beat their wives, talk about 'Nobody wants you but me,' slap them around, say 'Who else is going to buy you a dress?' Well, I'd rather walk naked than wear your wretched dress."

Sharpton, who is forty-seven, has been successful enough at what he does that his staff now numbers twenty. This includes a scheduler, a field director, and a full-time driver, who ferries him around the city in a black, Eddie Bauer-edition Ford Expedition. His organization, the National Action Network, has twenty-three chapters in fifteen states. Though it is still dangerous for white politicians to deal with him, it can be equally dangerous for them not to. Over the years, Sharpton and the New York press corps have worked out a symbiosis much like that of the crocodile and the Egyptian plover, though whose teeth are being cleaned by whom isn't always obvious.

If Sharpton were interested in conventional political power, he clearly could have acquired it by now; there are at least half a dozen congressional districts that would gladly elect him. Instead, the races he has taken on—two for the United States Senate and one for the mayoralty—have all been manifestly unwinnable. When, for instance, in 1994 he mounted a primary campaign against Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Sharpton received eighty per cent of the black vote and twenty-five per cent of the total—a stunning result, and yet still several hundred thousand votes shy of victory.

Sharpton's latest plan is to run for President of the United States. He is assembling an exploratory committee, which is headed by the Harvard professors Cornel West and Charles Ogletree. In the next few weeks, he plans to make his first visit to New Hampshire. Once again, it's easy to see where all this is headed. Sharpton will lose, and before that he will be reviled—mocked and derided for even putting himself forward. Running is, for him, an absurd decision, and, given the scope of his ambition, an irresistible one.

The House of Justice occupies the second floor of a weary, low-slung brick building on Madison Avenue, just south of 125th Street. Above it is the Israelite Church of God and Jesus Christ, and down in the basement is a used-record store, open only sporadically, which specializes in "oldies but goodies." Next door is a West Indian restaurant, Flavored with One Love, and next to that a fish place with spiritual aspirations. "Servants of God" reads the awning, right above "A Taste of Seafood."

For the last five years, the House of Justice has been Sharpton's base of operations, home to his office, and also to the auditorium where each Saturday he holds forth to his secular congregation. The rallies are broadcast on WLIB and WWRL, two black-owned radio stations, and several weeks ago I went to hear one live. Sharpton's lawyer, Michael Hardy, made the introduction: "Let me bring to you now the soul-reacher, the liberation-seeker, the people's preacher, the president of the National Action Network." Then Sharpton led off with his trademark call and response:

"No justice!" he shouted.

"No peace!" the crowd shouted back.

"No justice!"

"No peace!"

"No justice!"

"No peace!"

"What do we want?"

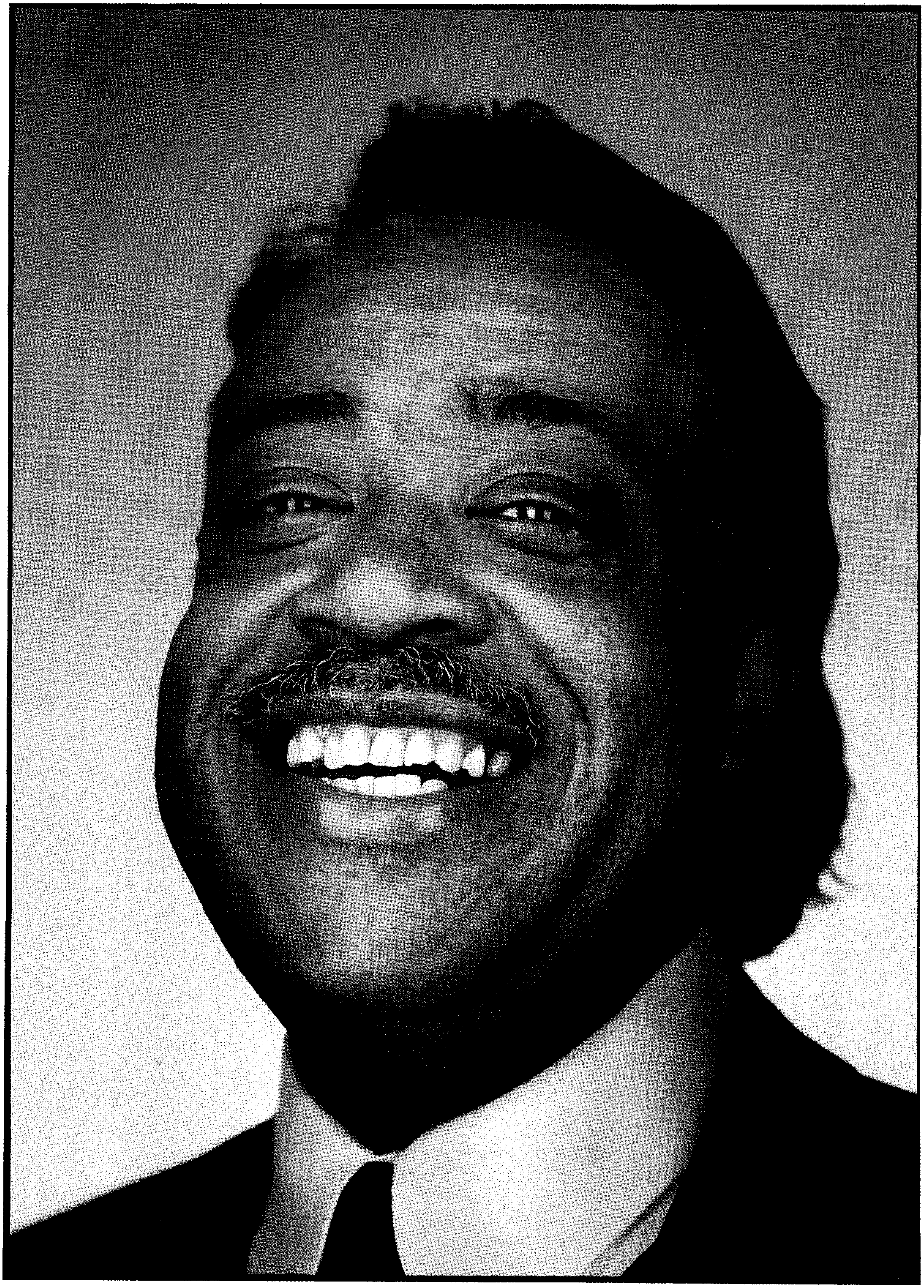
"Justice!"

"What do we want?"

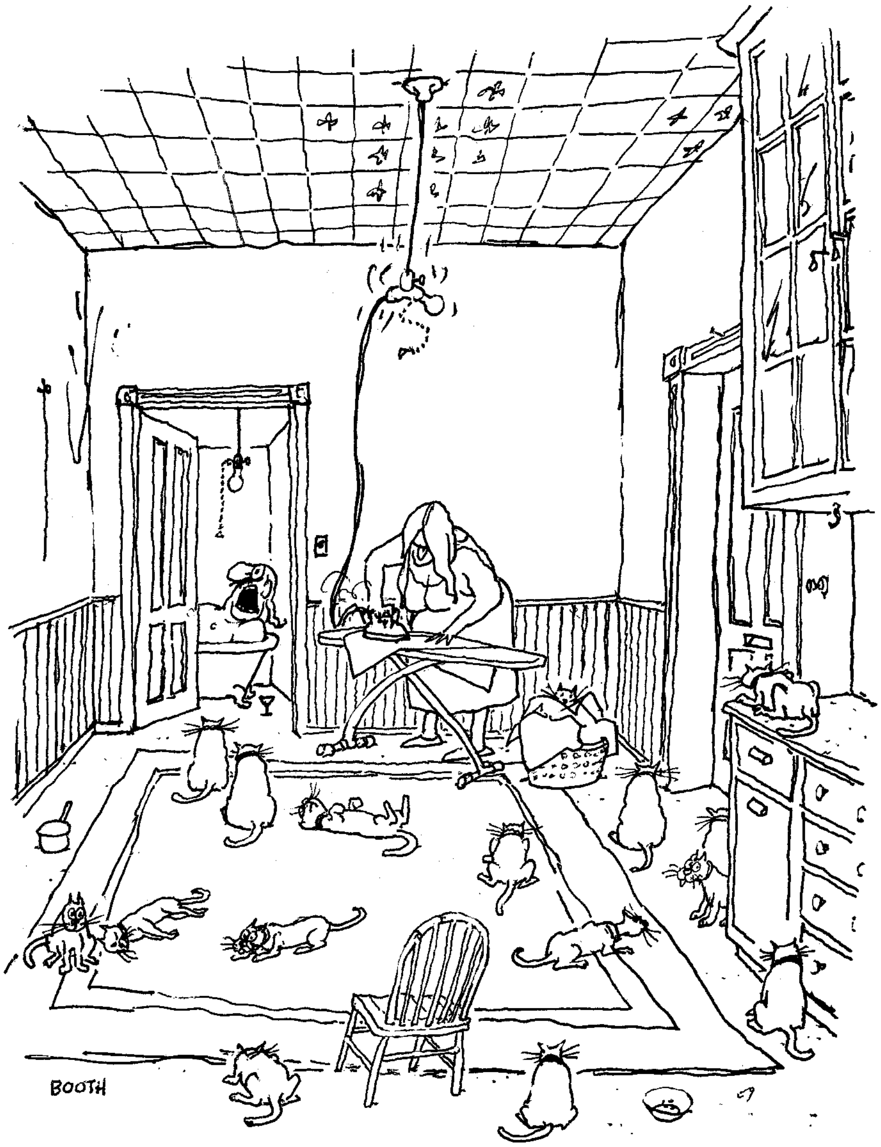
"Justice!"

"When do we want it?"

SABA



Sharpton, no longer a widely despised and marginal figure, is a widely despised and central one. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.



"Better bring me another cookie. The last one fell in the water."

• •

"Now!"

"When do we want it?"

"Now!"

"Hug the person next to you and tell them you love them."

Sharpton speaks entirely without notes about whatever happens to be on his mind. His method is to pick topics apparently at random—these range from Bible stories to current events—and then, in a final bravura rush, tie them all together. He is, as a speaker, both rambling and brilliant. "The guy's one of the finest preachers you will ever meet," the Reverend Floyd Flake, the former congressman from Queens, told me. (Almost every year, Flake invites Sharpton to speak to his congregation at Allen A.M.E. Church, one of the largest in the city.) On this particular Saturday, more than a month after Bloomberg's victory, Sharpton was still dwelling on the election. His other topics included Attorney General John Ashcroft, the fighting in the Middle East, a turbulent flight he had been on earlier that week to Chicago, and God's mercy.

The House of Justice auditorium is decorated with an assortment of posters and paintings of civil-rights leaders, among them Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Jesse Jackson, and—mostly—Sharpton. (One huge photograph shows him dressed in prison garb.) In one corner, partly hidden by a column of stacking chairs, stands an enormous wooden fist. About a hundred and fifty people were in the room that Saturday, including a woman in the front row who was holding aloft a handwritten sign advertising a booklet with the names of "70 more cop-killed black males since October, 2000, in the NY tristate area alone." There were frequent cries of "Teach!" and "Tell it, Rev!" and also much laughter.

At one point, Sharpton described a recent breakfast he had had at an upscale restaurant with a young aide. The aide had ordered a poached egg and apricots—Sharpton recounted this part of the story in a fake British accent—while he himself ordered grits. "You go around town trying to act like you're eating fried roaches as a delicacy," he said. "You say, 'Oooh, this is *interesting*.' What does this do for you? Well, it'll kill you if you eat it. You can make anything look right. You take some mess, put some chocolate on it, sprinkle sugar, and the wanna-be Negro will stand in line to buy it."

Usually pictured as angry, Sharpton is, in fact, a satirist who specializes in bathos. He is forever poking fun at the "wanna-be Negro," or his close cousin the cocktail-sipping Negro. According to Sharpton's typology, this figure, who surprisingly often seems to have attended Harvard, is consumed by a self-hatred he pathetically mistakes for ambition. At the same rally, Sharpton also told a story about an executive wanna-be. Hoping to curry favor with his boss, the executive had assured him that he could ignore Sharpton. Then, when promotion time came, the boss denied him the promotion. "And the only one who could have fought the issue was me," Sharpton announced. "It wasn't nothing for me, but I could make it something for you, if you wasn't so dumb."

Although he is not a separatist or a black nationalist—he labels these views "escapist"—Sharpton is nonetheless a fatalist. Whites, he argues, haven't changed the way they feel about blacks, and perhaps they never will. "The bus driver didn't change his mind, Rosa Parks changed hers," he likes to say. Above all else, the wanna-be is a stand-in for those who don't understand this truth, or refuse to accept it, a group that includes Sharpton's moderate political rivals, as well as those members of his audience wavering in their commitment. "This is real," he declared at one point. "This ain't no part-time, do-it-when-you-like-it, I'm black today, having a black attack, then I'm going back to normal tomorrow. Many of you at home get black attacks. Well, cop stopped the car, so we're mad. So you go to two rallies. Let me tell you something. What we can't convince you of by preaching, the forces are going to force you into."

Toward the end of his address, Sharpton told the parable of the prodigal son. In his race-inflected version of the story, the son leaves home because he feels his family isn't good enough: "I ain't with this no more; you all ain't sophisticated enough for me." He squanders his portion amid high-living strangers, only to be scorned by them. Eventually, the son comes to a realization: "I ain't got to live like this, you all disrespecting me, you all acting like I'm nothing, like I'm lower than the hogs." And so he returns to the place that, in his self-loathing, he had originally rejected.

" 'Well, what are you saying, Sharpton?' " Sharpton asked himself. "I'm telling you it's time for us to come home. We wandered out there. We tried to be what we're not. You boogied around the White House for eight years because Clinton didn't mind letting Negroes in the big house. But you didn't take care of the people. You were too busy posing for Christmas pictures, rubbing your nose in champagne jars. But now you're lower than the swine—Ashcroft rubbing your face in the mud. None of your Christmas cards in the White House mean nothing now. You're eating the husk that the swine eat.

" 'Well, well, Rev, what are you talking about?' " he went on, his voice rising as he prepared to gather up the morning's many loose threads. " 'Mark Green lost!' Yeah, but we didn't. Because to have coöperated we would have lost our dignity. To coöperate with being marginalized and demonized we would have lost our self-respect. When we didn't have no money in Birmingham, when we didn't have master degrees from Ivy League colleges in Selma, when we didn't have the ability to write memos on computers in Mississippi, we always had our self-respect. We always had our dignity. And when I think about them little nameless, faceless black women that marched in Birmingham, them babies that laid in front of water hoses, they had some self-esteem and self-respect. Columbia can't give that to you. Harvard can't give that to you. You've got to go home and find out who you are. And something will rise up in you never to fall again. And you can climb through the turbulence. You can survive through the storm. God will make a way. Hold on just a little while longer. We don't have a minute, but hold on anyhow. Because if you hold on, if you hold out, He'll make your enemies leave you alone."

Then Sharpton started to sing, as he always does at the end of a rally. "Everybody sing 'Amen,' " he began, and the audience took it up. "Everybody sing 'Amen.' Everybody sing 'A-men, amen, amen.' "

After the rally, Sharpton ducked into his office with Michael Hardy and closed the door. Soon the two were joined by Sharpton's wife, Kathy Jordan. A strikingly attractive woman who wears her hair in a mountain of reddish curls, Jordan used to sing backup for James Brown and now sings in the choir for the Saturday-morning rallies. As she swept by, several people told her how much they admired her outfit—a white leather top paired with a black leather skirt. Married for twenty-one years, Sharpton and Jordan renewed their wedding vows at a ceremony last summer attended by many of the city's most prominent politicians, including two former mayors, Koch and David Dinkins. Sharpton and Jordan live in Flatbush and have two teen-age daughters, Dominique and Ashley.

After Jordan and Hardy left, Sharpton called me into the room. Most of the office is taken up by a large L-shaped desk that holds several stacks of papers and a computer. The computer was in its screen-saver mode, and the phrase "No Justice, No Peace" kept scrolling across the monitor. Sharpton retreated briefly to the bathroom to change; when he emerged, in a fresh white shirt, I asked him about the point of the Saturday rallies. He answered in the most pragmatic terms possible, saying that the rallies were useful to him. "I have my own communication network set up," he told me.

I then asked about some of the stories he had recounted, like the one about ordering grits. "I try to make people not feel like they have to apologize for their authenticity," he explained. And the one about the executive who didn't get the promotion? "The most stable secret support group I have is people that played by the rules," he told me.

Sharpton went on to cite the example of the defamation suit that arose from the Tawana Brawley case. The case remains, in many ways, the defining event of his career, and a continuing source of conflict. In the fall of 1987, Brawley, a fifteen-year-old high-school student, was found lying in a garbage bag covered with feces, and said that she had been raped by a gang of white men. Her tale was later shown to be a hoax, but only after Sharpton and Brawley's other "advisers" had named Steven Pagones, then an assistant district attorney, as one of her assailants.

Pagones subsequently sued for defamation and infliction of emotional harm. The suit dragged on for a decade, until, in the summer of 1998, a Poughkeepsie jury found in his favor. An award of a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars was levied against Brawley, who didn't show up at the trial, and to this day remains in hiding. Sharpton was ordered to pay Pagones sixty-five thousand dollars, but he never took the trouble to settle up, instead ducking subpoenas and insisting he had no assets. (Sharpton has still not expressed remorse over any aspect of his role in the debacle.) When he was finally deposed, last winter, and his unorthodox financial arrangements came to light—Sharpton claimed under oath, for example, not actually to own his suits but simply to "have access" to them—several of the country's most prominent black businessmen, including Earl Graves, the chairman of the magazine *Black Enterprise*, and Percy Sutton, the chairman emeritus of Inner City Broadcasting, stepped in to bail him out.

Shaming as the whole episode might have been to some, Sharpton invoked it that morning as another illustration of the high standing that whites can't, or simply won't, credit him with. "No one ever stopped to say, 'Well, why would these guys do that?'" he said, referring to his wealthy patrons. "They had nothing to do with the Brawley case. It's because in their own minds and their own hearts they feel I'm saying and doing things they know are right and can't do themselves. And I have any number of corporate executives and political insiders who say, 'You do what I wish I could do, and I'm going to help you to keep doing it.' Percy Sutton used to have an expression, 'If we didn't have an Al Sharpton, we'd have to invent one.' All right, fine, I have enough charisma, or fire, to draw a crowd. But why are business leaders—you're talking about multimillionaires—they're not mesmerized by me. Let's be serious. What people have never stopped and thought about is that no one can survive as long as I have unless somebody needed them."

Sharpton was born in Brooklyn on October 3, 1954, the same year that the Supreme Court handed down Brown v. Board of Education. As a child during the great civil-rights struggles of the nineteen-fifties and sixties, he had little direct experience of segregation. Of the many stories about growing up that he told me, only one—about a trip down South to visit relatives—involved overt bigotry. "I remember one night we were driving, I don't remember if it was to Alabama or Florida, but we stopped somewhere in North Carolina, and my father and I went in to get some hamburgers and the guy refused to sell them," he said. "It was obviously a segregated place, but I didn't know anything about segregation. My father said to him, 'You don't understand—we're not going to eat here, we just want to take them out,' and the guy humiliated him. 'We don't serve niggers here.' It was the first time I saw someone defy my father."

Sharpton's father, Alfred, Sr., was a contractor who invested in real estate on the side. He was successful enough at both vocations that Sharpton led a sheltered, even privileged (by the standards of black New York) childhood. When he was still small, his father moved the family to Hollis, Queens, a racially mixed neighborhood, where they lived in a ten-room house and kept his-and-hers Cadillacs in the driveway.

Almost as soon as Sharpton could talk, he began preaching. He would line up his sister's dolls, put on his mother's bathrobe, and use a candle as a microphone. "I'm not talking about once or twice," he told me. "I would do this every week." Not a religious man himself, Alfred, Sr., didn't much care for his son's sermons; still, by the time Sharpton was four he had begun preaching regularly at the Pentecostal church favored by his mother, Ada—the Washington Temple Church of God in Christ—before a congregation that often numbered more than a thousand. At ten, he was ordained by the church's pastor, Bishop Frederick Douglass Washington, and during the 1964 New York World's Fair the "wonder-boy preacher," as he became known, held forth at a gospel-night celebration featuring Mahalia Jackson. She was sufficiently impressed to subsequently take him on tour with her.

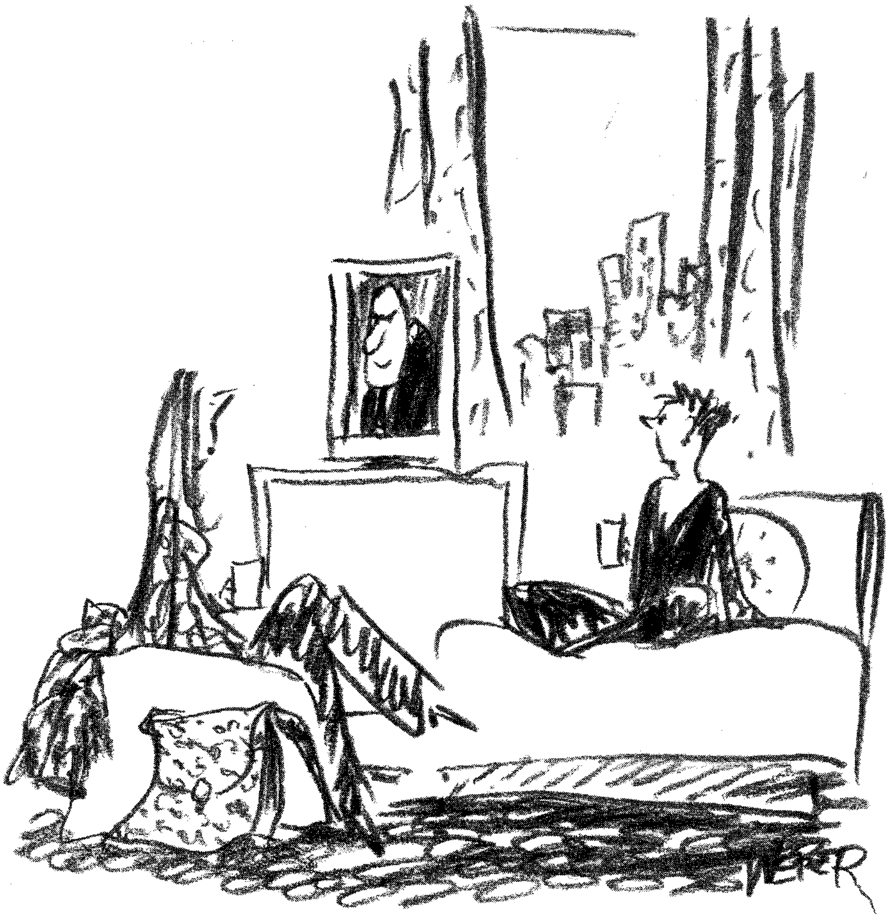
During the school week, Sharpton attended P.S. 134, where he remembers being uninterested in sports or games or, for that matter, anyone else's opinion. "I would always put on my school papers 'the Reverend Alfred Sharpton,'" he recalled. "And the teacher kept telling me, 'You can't put that there!' And I said, 'But that's who I am.' And it would drive her nuts. I was in third or fourth grade, and I remember that my conclusion was I didn't care what they said, that's what I was going to do. And I kept doing it. I don't even remember if they agreed, so much as they said there's no use trying."

One day in the spring of 1964, Sharpton came home from school to be told by his mother that his father was moving out of the house. Ada had a son, Tommy, and a daughter, Ernestine, by a previous marriage, and they had been living with the Sharpton family in Hollis. Ernestine, who was in her late teens, had, it turned out, been having an affair with Alfred, Sr., and was now pregnant by him. "My mother got very sick, and basically my father abandoned her," Sharpton told me. "We couldn't pay the bills. For many months, we had no lights, no gas; we had to try to wash up any way we could, at a neighbor's house, because we had no hot water, and no

"Everyone lies, son, but there are different pay scales."

phone. And you got to remember now, we're in this middle-class neighborhood, and eventually everybody in the neighborhood knows this."

Ada finally moved what was left of her family back to Brooklyn and went on welfare. Bishop Washington became something of a surrogate father to Sharpton, the first of many. Sharpton remembers Washington buying him, among other things, a new suit for Easter. Because the Bishop was an avid reader, Sharpton became one, too. "I used to sit in Bishop Washington's office all the time after Sunday service, and he'd sit and underline parts of books," Sharpton recalled. "I remember even before I could understand what I was reading, I used to sit and underline books. I mean, I'm walking around, twelve years old, with ten books, underlining. People say, 'Either this kid's a genius or a fraud, or both.' "



"The smile is courtesy of Photoshop."

Practically every Sunday morning, Sharpton still preaches, usually at a black church in New York, or, if he happens to be on the road, in Chicago or Atlanta or Los Angeles. In December, I went to hear him at Dunton Presbyterian Church, in South Ozone Park, Queens. A neighborhood of tightly packed one-family homes, South Ozone Park suggests from a distance middle-class stolidity; viewed close up, it suggests something nearer to poverty. It was the Sunday before Christmas, and the pews of the small brick church were full.

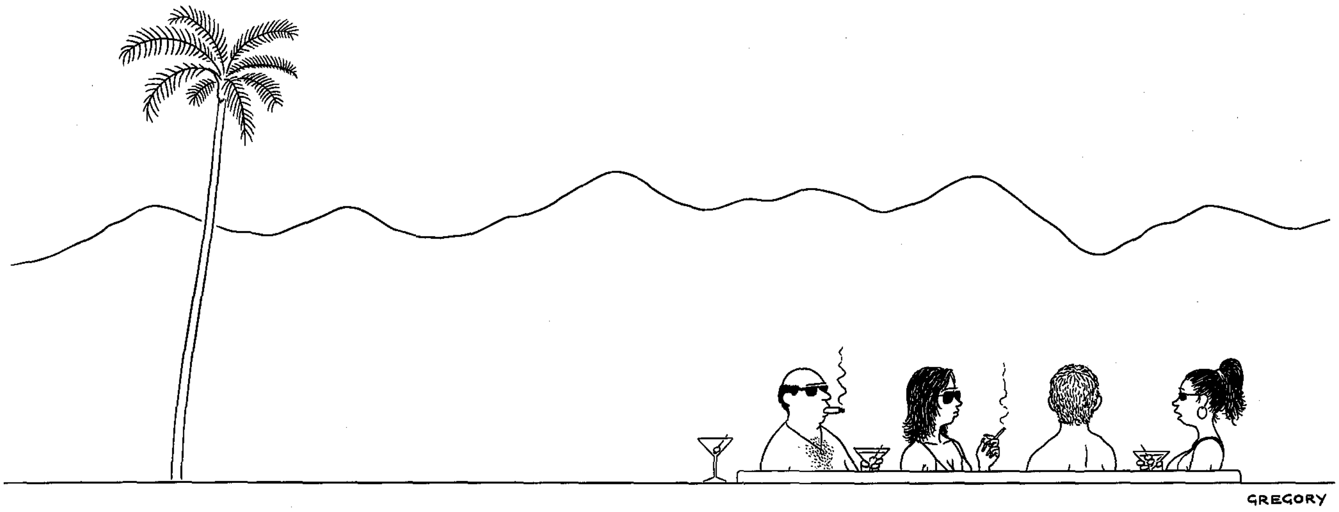
Sharpton's Sunday-morning sermons function more or less as the inverse of his Saturday-morning speeches—current events subordinated to faith. At Dunton, he spoke about the meaning of Jesus' birth, the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the importance of self-sacrifice. "I'll tell you, the hardest job of a black preacher is to preach the funeral of an insignificant Negro," he told the congregation. "Most folks shouldn't even have a funeral. Most folks should go straight from the morgue to the cemetery. Because most folks ain't done nothing we can talk about. Bought you a nice house. Who cares? We'll sell your house as soon as you die. The only thing that will matter two minutes after you're gone is if you did something for somebody other than yourself."

After he was finished, he changed his shirt, and made a brief stop at a luncheon that was taking place in the basement. "It's Reverend Sharpton! I can't believe it!" a teen-age girl exclaimed. The crowd broke into a chorus of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" as he posed for pictures. The church's choirmaster, a tall, gray-haired man wearing a Christmas tie, came up to Sharpton and said, "There's only two people I know that have lasted like you—you and Cassius Clay. You never compromised." People kept urging Sharpton to stay for lunch, but he said he had to go; he was on his way to a meeting with executives at PepsiCo about advertising in the black media.

Sharpton might well have become a conventional preacher with a conventional congregation—it was Bishop Washington's hope that Sharpton would one day marry his daughter and take over the Temple—had he not discovered something even more attractive. Poking around a bookstore one day when he was in elementary school, Sharpton came across a ninety-nine-cent biography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. He bought the book, and as he read it he became, in his words, "absolutely mesmerized."

At that time, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, Powell was the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, in Harlem, the congressman from New York's eighteenth district, and the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. Sharpton decided that he wanted to meet Powell, and began pestering his mother to let him go to Harlem. Finally, she relented, and one Sunday he took the subway uptown with his sister, Cheryl.

"To this day, I have never got the rush and the excitement that I got when I first saw Adam Clayton Powell," Sharpton told me. "I told friends of mine that I thought I had seen God. He was very tall, very erect, almost majestic. He didn't walk to the pulpit, he, like, strutted. He



"I think that if these Islamic fundamentalists got to know us they'd like us."

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preached a sermon about love. My sister was absolutely unimpressed, and I'm ready to leave the world. After church is over, hundreds of people are filing out, and I go with my presumptuous self and ask, 'Where's the pastor's office?' They show me where it is. And I walk over, down this long hall, and, I'll never forget, in those days they would have doors where you could open the top and the bottom was still shut. So you could barely see me over the bottom. And I'm knocking on the door. Finally, the lady comes and looks over, and I say, 'I'd like to see Reverend Congressman Powell.' She says, 'What?' I said, 'I'd like to see Reverend Congressman Powell.' She kind of smiles, and says, 'Who would I tell the pastor is calling?' I said, 'Reverend Alfred Sharpton.' She's, like, this is the biggest joke in the world, and I'm, like, what's wrong with you? She goes about her business, totally ignores me. So I knock again. And she again ignores me. The third time, she gets a little irritated, and she goes somewhere. And she comes back and—I remember it like it was yesterday—with this look of disbelief on her face. And she says, 'Follow me.' And she brings me in this inner room and Adam Clayton Powell is standing there, and there's two or three old women around, he has his arm around them, and he looks down—now, mind you, Adam was about six-three, six-four—and he says, 'Alfred Sharpton, boy preacher from F. D. Washington's church in Brooklyn.' And I say, 'You know me?' 'Sure, Washington's an old friend of mine.' Now I know he's God. Adam Clayton Powell knows me!" That very afternoon, Powell took Sharpton with him to one of his favorite haunts, the Red Rooster, a bar on Seventh Avenue, and Sharpton watched as the Congressman held court in the back. "It was the most amazing scene I'd ever seen," he said.

Sharpton came out of a denomination—Pentecostalism—that explicitly discouraged secular pleasure. Powell was nothing if not worldly. He liked to drink, to date beautiful women—he went through three wives—and to live well. "Keep the Faith, Baby" was the title he picked for a volume of his collected sermons, printed to pay off a libel judgment. Sharpton nonetheless attached himself to Powell, becoming, at the age of thirteen, an unofficial member of the Congressman's entourage. He was called "the kid," and in this capacity was introduced to everybody who was anybody in Harlem politics, or was hoping to be.

"I met Percy Sutton, Charlie Rangel, David Dinkins, all of them, when I was 'the kid' in Adam Clayton Powell's operation," he told me. "So it might have something to do with how I see them. They were just guys with dreams, hanging around. And I was one of the court jesters to the King of Harlem."

Sutton, who became Manhattan Borough President in 1966, remembers Sharpton as an almost preternaturally facile student. "He was an assembler of information and knowledge," Sutton told me. "He ingested material, and—how shall I say it?—regurgitated it much enhanced. Many people sort of adopted him, because they wanted to share with him."

It was on Powell's behalf that Sharpton staged his first protests. In 1967, Powell, who had been accused of misusing travel funds, was barred from taking his House seat pending an investigation. The following year, although he was reëlected, he was still prevented from voting. Not long afterward, Sharpton met Jesse Jackson, then the director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Operation Breadbasket. Sharpton, who had dangled a pencil from his lips in a schoolboy's imitation of Powell's cigar, approached Jackson in much the same spirit. "I had my own little crew of ten guys," he told me. "I had security. I'm little Jesse Jackson in school, because whatever Jesse was doing, that's what I was doing." As Sharpton recalls it, Jackson's first advice to him was "Choose your targets, do your research, and then kick ass." I asked Sharpton what targets he had found in high school.

"Everything," he said. I asked for an example. "One day, we were eating lunch, and I said, 'This food is inferior.' " He laughed. " 'Boycott it!' We called a boycott. I'm serious. Everything."

On an icy evening last month, Sharpton invited me to accompany him to the swearing-in ceremony of Charles Barron, an old friend of his who had just been elected to the City Council. When I arrived at Sharpton's office, he was watching a homemade video, one of a library of tapes he has compiled of Jesse Jackson's television appearances. Sharpton has continued to study Jackson—"It's like going over the text before you take the test," he told me—even as their relationship has changed. During the Clinton Administration, Jackson became quite close to the President—in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, he came to the White House to pray with Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea—and later he campaigned hard for Al Gore. According to Sharpton's general outlook on race relations, Jackson's efforts can mean only one thing—that he has given up the struggle. Sharpton is clearly attracted by the idea of displacing Jackson—his Presidential bid is both an homage and a challenge—and he has taken to hinting publicly that it is time for Jackson to retire. "If you want to be comfortable, you should do what Muhammad Ali did," Sharpton has said of his old mentor. "You should get a ringside seat and watch the fight."

After a while, we set off in Sharpton's Expedition for City Hall. We arrived late, but not as late as Barron. Council members are free to choreograph their own ceremonies, and Barron, who represents East New York, had chosen an Afrocentric theme. The ceremony began with the pouring of libations. This was followed by African drumming, an African dance, and, finally, a rendition of "Total Praise" by a gospel choir. Everyone joined in for "Lift Every Voice and Sing"—the black national anthem. The council chamber, which holds more than five hundred people, was packed, and, aside from a handful of council members there to advance their own political careers, I was, as far as I could tell, the only white in the room. (This was a common experience during the months I followed Sharpton.) Eventually, the oath of office was administered, by the Reverend Herbert Daughtry. Daughtry, who is seventy-one, heads a group called the National Black United Front. He cautioned the audience that there was a chance he might misstate the oath and instead of asking the new councilman to uphold the laws of New York ask something else: "Do you, Charles Barron, commit yourself to the ongoing revolution of the people?"

Barron, a former Black Panther, was wearing a blue tunic with gold trim and a matching peaked cap. He began by announcing that it was time for the council chamber, an ornate room hung with portraits of various early American heroes, all of them white, to be redecorated. "We are the new majority," he said to a roar of approval from the audience. "And we should have the majority of pictures on the walls!" Barron went on to advocate freedom for America's "political prisoners" and to vow to fight for reparations for slavery. "We built the bridges," he said. "We built Wall Street. Our ancestors cleared Brooklyn. In return, we were raped, we were murdered. And you have the nerve to say we should forget that? Not in your lifetime!"

When it was Sharpton's turn to speak, he recalled that it was exactly sixty years ago that the first black had been elected to the City Council. "His name was Adam Clayton Powell," he said. Sharpton reminisced about time that he and Barron had spent together in the Brooklyn House of Detention as a result of a protest, and he praised Barron as a man who "personifies politics at its best." In closing, he spoke about his own political ambitions, and the detractors who would, inevitably, mock them. "They ask me, 'Why are you going to run for President?' " he said, emphasizing the "why." "If I wanted to be a ballplayer, it would be all right. If I wanted to sing and dance and switch my hips, it would be all right. But I want to think and use my mind and my heritage to run the United States."

Sharpton left the ceremony as soon as he had finished speaking. Heading to his car, he checked the messages on his cell phone. We had been at City Hall for an hour and a half and in that time he had received fourteen messages. Two concerned the race for City Council speaker, five were about the fight between Harvard's Afro-American studies department and its president, Lawrence Summers, which was then making front-page news, and the remaining seven were about Vieques. Over the summer, Sharpton had joined the protest against Navy bombing on the island, and as a result had spent ninety days in federal jail. It took him approximately five seconds to realize that the latest development in the battle—a judge had dismissed an anti-bombing lawsuit—was newsworthy, and not a whole lot longer to figure out how to become part of the story. On the way uptown, he got on his cell phone and called a press conference, to be held at the House of Justice at eight-forty-five. It was eight-fifteen.

Sharpton became "Al," as opposed to the stodgier "Alfred," one night during the early nineteen-eighties in a hotel room in Miami. He was sitting around with James Brown, when, as he recalls it, the Godfather of Soul turned to him. "You need to cut that," Brown said. "It's got to be quick, something people can grab onto." He recommended "Al Sharp."

Sharpton regards Brown as the last and most devoted of his surrogate fathers. The two met not long after Brown's son Teddy was killed in a car accident, and they quickly became close. As part of his apprenticeship, Sharpton helped arrange for Brown to perform at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and George Foreman, in 1974. This led to a friendship with Don King, which, in turn, led Sharpton to serve briefly, under circumstances that remain murky, as an F.B.I. informant—a career twist that he has alternately denied outright and tried to explain away. (Among those he is reported to have provided information on is Danny Pagano, an organized-crime figure later convicted of racketeering.) In 1981, Brown and Sharpton cut an album together, "God Has Smiled on Me," with Brown singing and Sharpton preaching, and when Brown's manager had a heart attack Sharpton filled in for him, which is how he met his wife. Sharpton also got his curious hair from Brown, a style he adopted, he told me, "somewhere between admiration and duress."

As an impresario of protest, Sharpton draws heavily on the skills he learned from Brown, not the least of them being the art of self-promotion. In recent weeks, he has, among other things, proposed himself as a mediator between India and Pakistan in the conflict over Kashmir, requested permission to lead an ecumenical council to Guantánamo Bay, and held a town meeting with Enron employees in Houston. Rare is the Sharpton production in which he himself does not play a central role. In this regard, Vieques was fairly typical. During Sharpton's incarceration, his supporters camped in tents outside Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center while he conducted a hunger strike to protest his imprisonment. Later, Sharpton had a wooden platform built next to the jail so that when he emerged, some thirty pounds lighter, he could immediately hold a rally. The event—covered as a homecoming and a weight-loss story rolled into one—made the front page of both the *Times* and the *News*. Whatever the seriocomic spectacle accomplished in Vieques, in New York it established Sharpton as a hero in the Latino community.

"You know, New York is theatre, street theatre," Ed Koch, who has softened considerably toward his old enemy, told me. "You have to respond. Sharpton in large part is street theatre. It's a shtick, and it's effective." After the police shooting of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean immigrant, in 1999, Sharpton arranged what was probably his most ambitious protest: two weeks of civil disobedience that resulted in the arrest of hundreds, including the state comptroller, Carl McCall, and the actress Susan Sarandon. Koch remembers approaching Sharpton, in effect, to arrange a booking. "I called him up and I said I wanted to get arrested on Monday, but could I get arrested at ten in the morning?" Koch recalled. "He said, 'I can't do it at ten; I can only do it at eleven.' "

Sharpton gleefully exploits the logic of celebrity culture, by which a protest he is leading will make news because he is leading it. According to his detractors, this game of mirrors is all there is to him. When I told Michael Meyers, the director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, that I was writing about Sharpton, he blew up at me. "Al Sharpton is a media hound," he said. "He's a racial buffoon, a publicity stunt, and you guys fall in line. I want to know what has he ever done for quote-unquote his people, whoever they are?" Meyers, who is also a columnist for the *Post* and is black, went on to argue that the press's coverage of Sharpton represented, in itself, a form of bias. "The credibility he has has been given by the New York Paternalistic *Times*," he said. "It's racism. It's sheer lunacy, but it's also racism."

On the night of Barron's swearing-in, we arrived back at the House of Justice at roughly the same time that crews from WABC, WNBC, WCBS, UPN, and NY1 were pulling up. Once they had set up inside the auditorium, Sharpton delivered a brief statement, composed en route, saying that the ruling in the Vieques case should be appealed. Then he vowed, if need be, to go back to jail. Under what circumstances this would be necessary, or whether it was even a serious promise, were matters of minor significance. The crews had what they needed for the eleven-o'clock news and, as soon as they had packed up their equipment, dispersed into the night.

BOOKS
MEET THE GUY WHO SELLS THE BOOKS 9—7
P.C. VEY

Every Monday evening, Sharpton's most committed supporters get together for what are called organizing meetings, at which they discuss whatever protests, or "actions," are in the works. Often at these volunteer meetings, dinner is provided; on a Monday not long ago, the menu was fish stew, and the agenda included a planned boycott of the *Post*. When I arrived, about fifty people were sitting in the House of Justice auditorium at long tables. In contrast to the Saturday-morning rallies, where the audience had always been welcoming, the evening group was openly hostile. One woman came over and demanded to know who had told me I could come. Another said that she had never heard of a reporter being allowed to attend an organizing meeting and let me know that if it were up to her it wouldn't happen again.

The immediate inspiration for the *Post* boycott was last fall's Ferrer-Sharpton cartoons, and the group had produced flyers that showed six of the offending drawings on one side and the message "No Justice, No Profit" on the other. "We should not support any entity in our community that espouses racism," the flyers said. "The last thing we New Yorkers need is the fostering of ethnic and racial divisions." Most of the discussion, however, centered on a second piece of campaign literature, which, because of some lapse, still wasn't ready.

Sharpton clearly found the conversation tedious. "What I'm saying is, if he couldn't get the literature done, he should have reported that to somebody," he observed, trying to put an end to the finger-pointing.

"That's what we're saying, too," an elderly man insisted, refusing to let the issue drop. "We'd like to know what happened and why we can't get this going."

After still more discussion in this vein, Sharpton retreated to his office. The stew was served, and then people began putting together a mailing for the House of Justice's fifth-anniversary celebration. At one point, an older man, apropos of nothing in particular, began to rail about the role that Jews had played in the slave trade. This matter, he said, had not received the attention that it de-

WHEN AIFRIC AND I PUT IN AT THAT LITTLE CREEK

When Aifric and I put in at that little creek
in the shadow of Masatiompan
what struck me most was not the view. What struck me most
was the reek
as from the copper pan

her father would pore over each and every morning, the ravel
of straw-strain and honey-strand
as he leaned against the tiller post
and winced at his own kidney gravel.
When our little boat lurched toward the strand

Aifric herself lurched, and I was fortunate in being able,
on account of the riding up of her Aran
sweater that seemed to boast
not only "diamond" and "cable"
but "basket" stitches, to glimpse the spot where the colors ran

red and black. For though our sonar was pretty much state of the art,
the truth is that we had found our way back
along this coast
largely by means of the chart
her father had drawn and redrawn on Aifric's back

with nothing more than a bronze pin
and lamp soot and red ochre, the constant twinge and tweak
of detail with which he had been so engrossed
when he suddenly caught the swing of the boom and took that fatal spin
only the previous week.

—*Paul Muldoon*

served, even though he had been talking about it for forty years, and he went on to say that his mother had worked as a cleaning woman for Jews, who were very dirty people. A younger woman agreed with this assessment, and added that Jews were not good to work for, because "they try to squeeze every penny." I couldn't quite catch the connection, but another man who had joined the conversation complained that the media were still spreading lies about the Brawley case, and that it was impossible to get the truth out, even on black radio.

Sharpton calls himself a civil-rights activist, but the term, of course, has never accurately described what he does. Many of the issues he's taken up over the years have been, at best, tangentially related to the cause of civil rights, while others have been antithetical to it.

In 1995, for instance, Sharpton joined the campaign against Freddy's, a clothing store on 125th Street whose owner, a Jew, had tried to expand into space leased by a black. Sharpton's Saturday-morning rallies were used as a platform by many of the organizers of the campaign, which had an overtly anti-Semitic thrust, while Sharpton himself referred to the store's owner as a "white interloper." Eventually, a protester set fire to Freddy's, killing eight people, including himself. (Afterward, Sharpton apologized—sort of—for the "interloper" remark by saying he shouldn't have used the word "white.") For his work in the Diallo case, Sharpton received praise from many quarters, and the New York Civil Liberties Union briefly considered giving him an award for it. But even in this case Sharpton quickly exceeded the limits of civil-rights advocacy. Before the grand jury had finished hearing the evidence against the four officers who shot Diallo, he was demanding that they be indicted. As Michael Meyers put it to me, "You cannot regard someone as a civil-rights activist who does not believe in due process of law."

Nor, in the end, is it necessarily accurate to view what Sharpton does even as activism. Most of the critical challenges of the inner city, like improving child care and education and housing, don't lend themselves to protests or marches or civil disobedience. Sharpton isn't interested in causes like these. Just half a block from the House of Justice is an empty lot surrounded by a wooden construction barrier. A sign proclaims it the "Future home of the Harlem Children's Zone," a school and community center. I first noticed the sign about a year and a half ago, and in all that time there has been no hint of progress.

I once asked Sharpton which of his accomplishments he was most proud of. He pointed to his campaign against racial profiling and his performance in the mayoral primary of 1997, when he received a third of the vote. On another occasion, I tried to press him about why he didn't pursue more concrete goals. "I have no desire to be an inside player, and no desire to be in social service," he told me. "Building housing is good. But I'll support Johnny Ray Youngblood"—a Brooklyn minister—"in doing that. I do social change—broad, policy climate-setting. And that's what I always will do."

In his book "Race Matters," Cornel West, the co-chairman of Sharpton's 2004 Presidential exploratory committee, devotes a chapter to what he calls "The Crisis of Black Leadership." There he argues that the failure of black politicians to provide either moral vision or practical role models has left a void to be filled by figures of "even narrower visions, one-note racial analyses, and sensationalist practices." As examples of these "protest leaders," who according to West operate in a "myopic mode . . . often, though not always, reeking of immoral xenophobia," he names Louis Farrakhan and "the early Al Sharpton."

By West's accounting, the year Sharpton matured as a leader was 1991, the same year he was nearly stabbed to death by a white man in Bensonhurst. (Visiting Sharpton in the hospital, Jesse Jackson joked that the only reason he had survived the attack was that he had seven inches of fat and the blade was just six inches long.) Sharpton, too, has cited 1991 as a turning point. "In the past I have been guilty of letting ungodly things around me, of excusing hate and violent intent and imagery in my presence," he wrote in "Go and Tell Pharaoh," his 1996 autobiography. "After the stabbing I saw the gravity of what we were doing and realized that I had to choose sides, to decide who I was and what I stood for. I started taking myself, and my movement, a lot more seriously than I had; I started judging the means as well as the end."

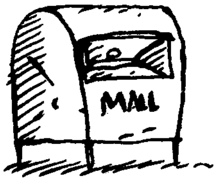
In early 1992, the new, more morally disciplined Sharpton gave a speech at Kean University, in New Jersey. "Why did they make us slaves?" he asked at one point. "We were the masters of the universe, so if you want to build an empire, you get people who know how to do that. That's historical fact. That ain't racism; that's facts. White folks was in the cave when we had built empires. . . . We taught philosophy and astrology and mathematics before Socrates and them Greek homos ever got around to it."

Whether or not Sharpton has genuinely changed, his status has. No longer a widely despised and marginal figure in New York politics, he is a widely despised and central one. On a fairly typical day I spent with Sharpton recently, he began the morning by putting in a call to Senator Charles Schumer. Later, he received a request for a meeting from Alan Hevesi, who is running for state comptroller, and a visit at the House of Justice from state assemblyman Adam Clayton Powell IV. (Powell had two sons, Adam Clayton Powell III and Adam Clayton Powell IV.) Toward evening, Andrew Cuomo, who would like to be New York's next governor, also pitched up.

Politicians are pragmatists, and in courting Sharpton they are simply following the numbers. Every one of Sharpton's campaigns has taken place under absurdly adverse circumstances. In 1992, when he ran for the United States Senate for the first time, he had recently been on trial for fraud, was still under tax indictment, and had virtually no campaign funds. Nevertheless, he received two-thirds of the black vote and, in the four-way Democratic primary, came in third, outpolling the sitting city comptroller, Liz Holtzman. In his mayoral race, in 1997, Sharpton received eighty-five per cent of the black vote, and by so doing nearly forced a runoff for the Democratic nomination. These results reflect support that extends far beyond the crowd at the House of Justice. By Sharpton's account, he has maintained this support not despite all the efforts to discredit him but in part because of them. "If my critics were more even-handed, they probably could keep people more against me," he once told me.

I spoke to many prominent black New Yorkers about Sharpton. Although they expressed mixed feelings toward him, they generally agreed on the nature of his appeal and also on his immunity from white criticism. "When Sharpton did Tawana Brawley, that was perceived by most of the white press, and most white New Yorkers, as a disaster," Phil Thompson, a former Dinkins-administration official who is now an associate professor of political science at Columbia, observed. "It seemed like 'Why keep fighting this battle when you're losing?' What that misses is there's a black tradition of fighting against long odds. It's called 'speaking truth to power.' Sharpton said, 'I'm going to support and believe in this child,' and there's something profoundly resonant in the black community about that."

Eric Adams is the co-founder of a group called A Hundred Blacks in Law Enforcement, which has worked sometimes with Sharpton and sometimes against him. To explain the breadth of Sharpton's support, Adams recounted a recent conversation he had had on the subway with a black Wall Street trader. "Our conversation started because he was reading the paper, and he mentioned something that Sharpton spoke about," Adams told me. "And he said, 'That's why I like this guy!' He started to talk about his life on the trading floor, and how this glass ceiling is there, and how he wants to just go in and punch his boss in the nose. He said that his boss was so pissed off when Sharpton did a rally down on Wall Street that his boss turned red and had conniptions. And he said, 'I wish that Sharpton would march every week so I could piss my boss off the way he pisses me off all the time.'"



Adams continued, "Many black professionals thought if they burned the midnight oil, if they got those A's, if they went to the prestigious institutions and made it out, they would follow the same professional track as their white counterparts, and reach for that American dream—only to find out it was a nightmare. And Sharpton is the only one that allows them in their cocooned, professional state—they're too tied up, they've got to meet that Mercedes payment, keep that house in the Hamptons, send their kids to private schools—Sharpton is all they have to stand in the face of the people they would love to stand in the face of and give them a bloody nose. And that's why they love him."

Far and away the biggest event of the year at the House of Justice is the annual Martin Luther King Day celebration. Called a "public-policy forum," the event isn't really a forum and doesn't deal much with public policy; rather, it is a series of speeches delivered by a parade of community leaders and public officials. In a different setting, such a holiday gathering could easily devolve into a feel-good celebration of racial harmony; at the House of Justice, there's little risk of this. Two years ago, for instance, one of the speakers at the forum told a rambling but still recognizably anti-Semitic tale about being fired by two Jews and hired by a third. (The last Jew was Jesus.) A few minutes later, Hillary Clinton, then a candidate for the Senate, mounted the stage.

Every year, the list of politicians who come grows longer. Last month's attendees included Senator Schumer; the state attorney general, Eliot Spitzer; the state comptroller, McCall; the city comptroller, Bill Thompson; and the city's public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum. Charles Barron was given the honor of introducing the new City Council speaker, Gifford Miller. Miller noted that just a few days earlier he had received a gift from Barron: "a hammer and some nails so we could put up some new pictures at City Hall."

Many of Sharpton's guests come in a spirit of fear, a condition that fits well with his sense of the holiday. "I've said throughout the years, and I'll say again, 'Ultimately, Dr. King won,'" he told the crowd. "Because today even in Mississippi, where it was once against the law for us to read and write, the libraries are closed for Dr. King's birthday." He went on, "Even in Alabama, where in city halls they wouldn't let us register to vote, they can't go to work today, because it's Martin Luther King's birthday."

THE WORLD'S #1 MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER
Make me proud before I die.
I'm begging.

During his tenure, Rudy Giuliani refused to deal with Sharpton. He never came to the forum and, as Sharpton likes to point out, also was never invited. This year, though, Mayor Bloomberg accepted an invitation, and, what's more, brought along his police commissioner, Raymond Kelly. Sharpton could have treated the gesture as one of good will, but instead told a joke exposing it for what it was. "There will be some cynics who say, 'Mr. Mayor, did you kiss Reverend Al's ring?'" he announced. "First of all, let me take my ring off." When it was Bloomberg's turn to speak, he promised to keep coming back to the forum "for each of the four years that the voters of the city of New York have given me." The Mayor went on to assert, with his usual blithe optimism, "We shouldn't forget that the world, or at least America and particularly New York, is getting better." The crowd met the remark with silence. (Later, Sharpton told me, "Let's hope that he and I are speaking every year," a prospect that did not seem terribly likely.)

Like Bloomberg, most other whites probably want to believe that post-civil-rights America is a fairer, better place. Sharpton's entire extraordinary career can be seen as a response to this view, an effort to prove it not only false but, more essentially, self-protective. When he is attacked as a race-baiter, which is just about all the time, Sharpton turns the accusation around. "What they're really saying is I should accept we can't walk in Howard Beach," he told me. "And to go out there is not exposing racism but I'm fanning the flames. Like I went out there and taught the people in Howard Beach and Bensonhurst how to use the N-word." (In 1986, a white mob in Howard Beach chased to his death a black man who had stopped in the neighborhood for a slice of pizza; in 1989, a white mob in Bensonhurst killed a black man who had come to look at a used car.) Those who claim that he is exacerbating racial tensions are, he said, "those that want to deny that racism exists, and don't want someone to pull the covers off. I knew that all I had to do is walk down the street in Bensonhurst and they would prove the case. And how did I know it? Because I grew up in New York and I knew where I was. What did I do to exacerbate that? Get off a bus and walk down the block?"

The irony of his position, of course, is that it tends toward its own kind of conservatism. Ambitious and energetic as he is, Sharpton looks at the world and sees a set of limits. These limits are the theme of every rally and protest, and even of his upcoming race for President; by running, he will show not what is possible for a black man in America but, once again, what isn't. Like all good theatre, his campaigns are about mobilizing emotions. Sometimes the process is productive, but often it is just the reverse—a summoning up of passions that only ends up dissipating them.

After the forum was over, Sharpton went into his office. I asked him how he thought the afternoon had gone, and he pronounced himself satisfied: "You couldn't think of anybody we wanted who wasn't here." He turned on the TV, and clicked to NY1, where every few minutes a clip of the forum was airing, sometimes showing Sharpton taking off his ring, sometimes the Mayor promising to come back. Sharpton watched himself appear and reappear on the screen five or six times. Then he packed up his things, spritzed on some cologne, and headed out to a taping downtown at Comedy Central. In the short walk to his car, he ran into an elderly woman. She was leaning on a cane, and when she saw him she smiled. "I am blessed to see you," she said. ♦

FICTION

LOST AND FOUND

BY TESSA HADLEY

The weekend that Helly brought her new boyfriend down to Clare's house in the West Country, Clare's younger brother, Toby, was also staying there, following the family around with his video camera, making a documentary for his college course.

Clare gave the camera one quick exasperated glance when the doorbell rang and the guests arrived. The food should have been ready, but she was still chopping hurriedly amid a debris of vegetable leavings; her fingers were covered with parsley bits.

"Oh, Toby, *stop* it!"

Her glance at the camera—she looks at the lens and not at Toby, as if it were his eyes—is caught forever on the tape. She is wishing she had had time to change into the nicer clothes she had chosen. Her hair is in a short thick black plait on her shoulder, fastened with a rubber band. She looks tired. When she is tired (she believes), all the things that, when she is at her best, make her look like an intellectual—small eyes, neat straight brows, thin lips, a square high forehead—just make her look like a librarian. She has good skin, but it is pink and hot because she is flustered. Her glance is naked and hostile—her last moment of free expression before she has to put on a smiling face.

It's not clear whether the hostility is directed at Toby, for filming, or at Helly, for finding her out in her humiliation, dragged down by the children, without makeup, with wet red hands.

When Helly introduced her new boyfriend to Clare, she said, "You two may know each other. David comes from around here, too. We must all have been at teen-age parties together. He knows people we knew."

But the man was a stranger, an alien in Clare's house, with shades hiding his eyes and an exaggerated presence she flinched from. He had a large head and thick dark hair standing straight up from his forehead, curvy big cheekbones, and blue-black stubble on his chin. In his thick beautiful leather coat, he was loudly and confidently friendly, in a way that suggested immediately to Clare that he didn't want to be here in the provinces visiting his girlfriend's friend who was nobody.

When they all kissed, the Londoners smelled expensively of scents and lotions, and Clare was aware of her limp T-shirt, which had soaked up the smell of the onion soup she was making for lunch. The soup, with Parmesan toasts baked in the oven, would be delicious. And Helly couldn't cook. But Clare feared that everything brilliant and savory about her might appear to have drained into that onion soup, leaving her wan and dull and domesticated.

Helly was her best friend.

Recently, Helly had been paid thirty thousand pounds (twice as much as Bram, Clare's husband, earned in a year) to appear in a series of advertisements for ice cream; the ads were shown on television and in the cinema, as well as on billboards. Everywhere Clare went, she was surprised out of her reverie by Helly's golden face or by the misty curves of Helly's body, intently and extravagantly inviting her into a larger-than-life golden vanilla space concealed inside the prose of every day. These images got in the way for a while whenever Clare was with the real Helly: the real Helly would seem for the first few minutes slightly contracted, smaller and more precise than she should be, and muffled in surprising clothes.

Helly was embarrassed about the ads. She was a serious actress. She did get work, in fringe and in soaps, but not enough; she was still waiting for her break. And no one, no one, could have turned down thirty thousand pounds. The advertisements paid for the serious work: that was the theory. But Helly's friends couldn't help feeling that something momentous had happened, that Helly had stepped irretrievably into a current of money and frivolity and glamour that would carry her off. Anyway, she wasn't strikingly talented as an actress. Although none of them quite acknowledged it, the ads were more exciting, really, than if Helly had got a good part in a play. They watched to see what would happen next.

Clare could remember that when she and Helly were fifteen one of their shared fantasies had been to imagine their naked bodies projected lingeringly onto a cinema screen in front of an audience. So she couldn't be sure just how genuine Helly's contemptuous indifference to those golden simulacra plastered everywhere was. Or how genuine her own contemptuous indifference was, either.

The two visitors filled up the little terraced house with noise and cigarette smoke and things. Although they were staying only one night, they had brought in from the car bags of presents and bottles of wine and flowers and a camera and a portable mini-disk player and a heap of leather luggage; also a laptop, on which David had already tried to access his E-mail. (He worked as a lighting technician, designing systems for stage shows and clubs: this seemed to necessitate frequent contacts with his associates and long sessions on the mobile phone.) They talked more loudly and constantly and laughed more than Clare was used to.

And she was taken aback at how profoundly she coveted Helly's beautiful clothes. She liked to think that she was fairly indifferent to material possessions. Under Bram's influence, she had given away lots of her CDs, deciding she had outgrown them. They had a house full of books but no television, and Clare made her own bread and ground her own spices and salted lemons to put in salads and chicken dishes. She bought most of what she wore in charity shops: not grudgingly but pointedly, because it was more original to put together your own bits and pieces. But when she saw Helly's long lilac-colored dress and her green velvet jacket sewn with mirrors and her toenails painted green she was reminded that there was something else you could do with your clothes, something more than just original, something that amounted to power and joy. You needed money to make the look of you mysteriously arouse both longing and satisfaction—though you had to have a gift, too, to choose the right things so inventively and surely.

LISA KERESZI "PONTANI SISTERS" (2001)

Helly was grievously good to look at: tall and spare, all flat planes, wide shoulders, big hands and feet, with sharp cheekbones and a long mobile mouth. Her eyes were light green, and her skin was really quite pale, not golden as it was in the ads. Her spiky hair was blond out of a bottle, with the roots left deliberately dark. The children came and watched Helly and David as if they were a show. Lily, who was seven, reached out a finger and stroked the velvet of Helly's sleeve. Rose put on her Superman cape especially for David, who didn't notice. He never knew what he was supposed to say to people's children, he confessed. Helly was the one who made the effort; she'd brought them things, and she talked to them in a chaffing ironic voice that Clare knew (she knew Helly very well) meant that she was slightly afraid of them, not sure what they were thinking or how to please them. Coco, the oldest and the only boy, was deeply suspicious of both visitors. He winced at Helly's silver lip ring and ignored her, as if it were kinder not to draw attention to how she shamed herself by wearing it. But he was drawn, almost against his better judgment, to the laptop. Even Clare's brother Toby—infuriatingly, because he was twenty-one and should have been backing her up as a fellow-adult—sat dumbly smiling and blushing, in spite of all Helly's efforts to draw him out. (Clare knew Helly would be much more confident of how to please Toby, not because she had known him since he was a boy but because he was a man now, and couldn't take his eyes off the lip ring.)

Twelve years, thirteen years ago, they calculated, David and Clare and Helly had all lived in this city but strangely did not seem to have known one another. David had even been in the sixth form with a boy Clare had gone out with for months. They'd had so many teen-age haunts in common, a pub, a club (even the city reference library, where they revised for A levels), and so many mutual acquaintances, it seemed impossible that they hadn't met.

"I'm just beginning to remember,"

David said. "Seeing you two together, it's starting to come back to me."

"Don't believe him." Helly laughed. "He's just flirting."

He was flirting, although Clare presumed he was only using his flirtation with her in some game with Helly. She was as aware of the unaccustomed aura of sexual tension in her house as she was of the unaccustomed cigarette smoke: both things made her anxious and excited at once, and she was already bracing herself for when Bram came in. He would sniff them both out immediately, and disapprove of them, although he would be as always—infallibly—courteous and friendly. This was why Clare didn't see Helly very often anymore. It stretched her too painfully, having to defend Helly from Bram's disapproval while mobilizing inside herself all her best arguments against the way Helly's life tempted her and made her envious.

"Did you know someone called Tim Dashwood?" David asked.

"Tim Dashwood? No," Clare said.

"Yes, we did," Helly said. "Remember? We went to parties at his flat. Very naughty parties. Where we got up to all sorts of things. *Pas devant les enfants*."

"What did you do at the naughty parties?" Lily asked.

"Lots of rubbish, I expect," Coco said.

"That's exactly right," Helly said. "You're so right. Lots and lots of rubbish. And d'you know what we used to wear? I'll bet you can't imagine your mummy dressed entirely in black clothes, with a black bustier, and black eye makeup and fingernails and lipstick. We were briefly gothic. It didn't last. But that was the Tim Dashwood period. We didn't know him well. He and his friends must have been older than us."

"Black lipstick! Yuck!" Lily said. "What's a bustier?"

"Something silly that ladies wear, like underwear on top of their clothes."

"I suddenly had a feeling that that was where I was remembering you from," David said. "I'm sure I can remember Clare at one of Tim's parties."

"I can't," Clare said, puzzling. "I can't even remember anyone called Tim."

"Can you remember me there?" Helly asked him.

"Perhaps. Did you used to have long plaits?"

"Long black ones, naturally."

"Then maybe, maybe."

"If I ever look in my old diaries from those days," Clare said, "which mostly I don't—it's too hideous—then I feel as if I'm reading about someone else. Not just people I knew that I can't remember, and places I went and things I did, but feelings I felt, things I wanted. It doesn't connect to me as I am now."

"You keep a diary, do you?"

"Oh, not anymore. I wouldn't keep one now."

"She's got volumes of it. She used to write pages every night," Helly said.

"It's so embarrassing. The entries begin with things like 'Calories so far today: one centimetre of toothpaste, 5.' Or 'I know that now I will never, ever, be happy again in my whole life,' about some boy whose name I can't even guess from his initials."

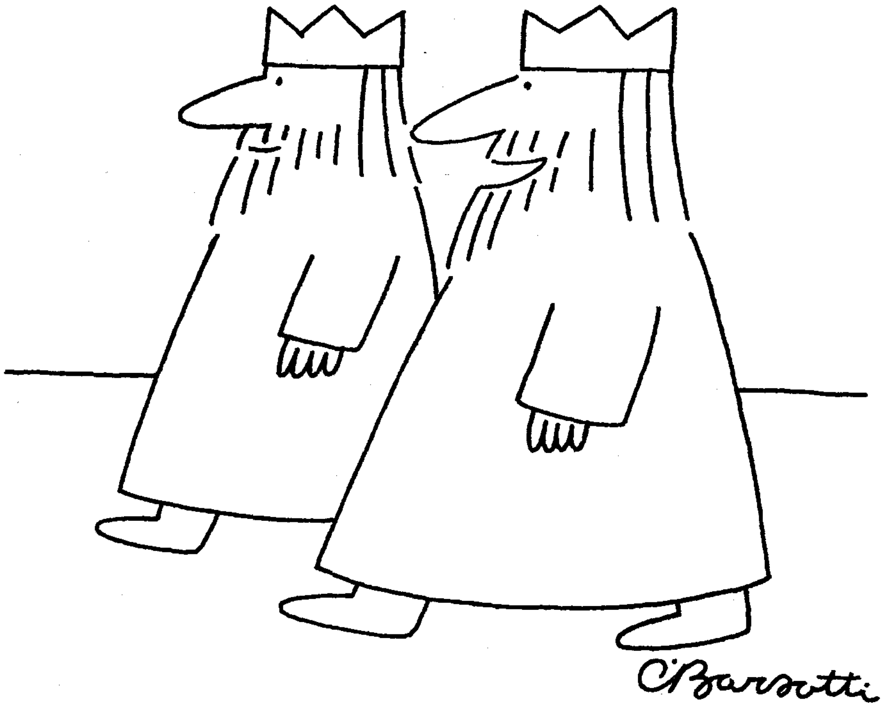
"So what do you remember from Tim Dashwood's party, David?" Helly asked.

He was simply the wrong scale for the little room crowded with books and pictures and delicate ceramics (Clare's father was a potter). He was sitting in his leather coat, with one leg crossed over the other knee, jammed into the most comfortable chair in the house (which was not all that comfortable). He shook his leg in what seemed to be a nervous habit, showing a stretch of big brown hairy calf above his scarlet sock, drumming his fingers on the arms of the chair. At least he had taken off his sunglasses. His eyes exposed without them were comical, doleful, as if they had been pulled down into his cheeks. He smiled as he considered the question. Rose put a little fat hand on his knee, which he ignored.

"I don't remember much. You know what his parties were like. That used to be the general point, right? To get so out of it you wouldn't remember much."

"Out of what?" Lily asked.

Clare and Helly had met at the Amery-James High School for Girls: from twelve to eighteen, they had lived in an intimacy that they would never attain again with anybody else. In the very process of their formation they had been intertwined, like two trees growing in the same space. They learned to smoke together, practicing at home (Clare's home, with more liberal parents) under each other's critical scrutiny until it looked right. Now Clare, who had quit, saw that Helly still tilted up her chin and blew her smoke off to one side in the way that they had decided was the most flattering. At school, they made a secret pact of resistance (the school motto was "So hateth she derknesse!"—they determined to love



"Nobody laughs at my library of self-help books now."

it); the pact was sealed by an exchange of drops of menstrual blood on tissues folded and tied around with hairs pulled from each other's heads. They went shoplifting together (for clothes, mostly, and makeup), setting it for themselves as a significant test, an initiation into the kind of adulthood they aspired to: transgressive, toughened, disrespectful—the opposite of the one that Amery-James aspired to on their behalf. Helly carried the shoplifting off with flair; Clare was cowardly and full of dread. Clare was the theorist, and Helly was the one who acted. Clare was the feminist—when they were fifteen, they read her stepmother's old copy of "The Female Eunuch" together, side by side on their stomachs on Helly's bed—but it was Helly who later rode a motorbike and went out on her own to pubs and clubs and mostly dismissed contemptuously the boys who asked her out. Clare had always suspected and concealed a secret abjectness in herself, some treachery of neediness toward the other sex that seemed to fulfill itself when she and Helly were in their early twenties and the serious business of life became men. The girls had turned their backs on each other then, ruthlessly cutting away old connections because they thought they had found, at last, the lives they really wanted.

Clare was putting the Parmesan toasts in the oven when Bram came in through the back door. He was working on a two-year project, recording the ecology of an area of mudflats and coastal grassland which would be covered by water when the new barrage for the city's marina was completed. On weekends, volunteer groups came down to help, and he had to be there to supervise, but he'd promised to be home for lunch. She was relieved that he came in the back way, because it meant that Helly and David would not see him in his unflattering cycling helmet. He was so without vanity (genuinely, she was sure—she had probed for it deeply enough) that she sometimes thought he looked for ways to make himself ugly, to undo the effect of gentleness that he couldn't help; he was blond and delicate, with a forward-thrust lower jaw that made him soften his consonants when he spoke.

"So what's this one like?" he asked, taking off the helmet, running his head under the cold tap, scouring himself with the towel.

"He's perfectly friendly. I think he's nice. Better than the last one, anyway." (After Helly brought the last one to visit them, Clare had found scorched tinfoil in the bathroom and feared the worst.) "He's a bit too *much*, though."

"Too much of what?"

"They sort of fill the place up."

"She always brings several changes of clothes, doesn't she? Just in case."

"You can hardly get past their luggage in the hall."

"And I suppose you've been hearing all about the delights of cultural happening in the capital?"

"Oh, they've been everywhere and done everything, and know everyone, of course."

This rehearsal of mutual ironic judgment felt comradely and consoling, but as soon as Bram went to talk to the visitors and Clare was left setting the table she was filled with unreasonable resentment at his tone. They hadn't really talked much about London; mostly she and Helly had talked about the old days. It was Clare's own fault if she had taken away any impression that things in London were more brilliant and thrilling than they were down here.

The lunch went off all right. At least the soup was good, and there seemed to be plenty of talk, although most of it was Helly's and David's. Helly told them funny stories about the shoot for the ice-cream ad, and David seemed to hold forth on every topic—he knew someone or he'd read something or he'd once worked somewhere. He even managed to find some kind of software program to talk about with Bram: Bram usually didn't try to compete whenever the conversation was noisy. Clare was used to presuming, wincingly, defensively, that Helly must think Bram was dull and stolid. She always made a point of trying to coax him out of what she probably imagined was his shell. Clare winced defensively for Helly, too: she had no idea how Bram recoiled from her coaxing.

Toby got it all on his video. Both of the visitors tried to encourage him out from behind his viewfinder. David had friends at a video-production company whom Toby should get in touch with;

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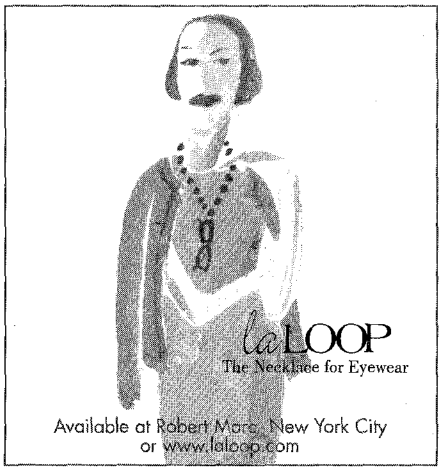
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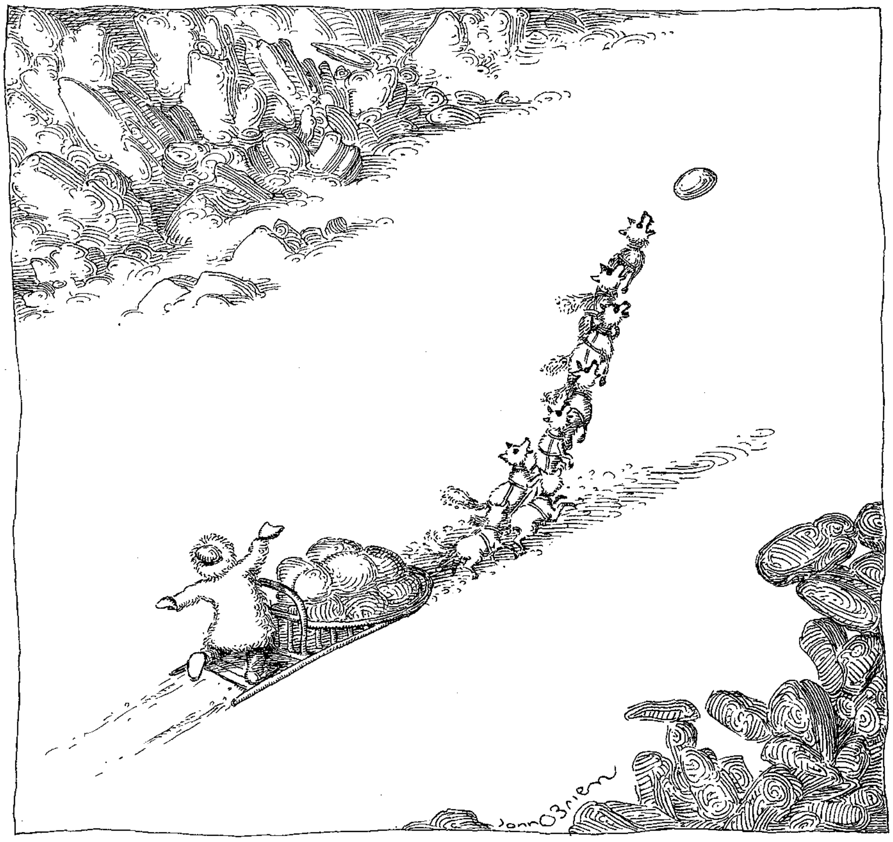

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Helly lit a cigarette for him and tried to draw him out on the subject of himself. But he couldn't resist the way the shots framed themselves around David and Helly, how dingy they managed to make ordinary family life seem. Rose tipped over her orange juice. Lily wouldn't eat the onion soup. Coco had broken his glasses, which had to be mended with a Band-Aid until they could get to the optician's on Monday. For some reason, Clare was exasperated at this, and at how patiently Bram mopped up Rose's orange juice with a cloth, although she knew that this was unfair, and knew how much more exasperated she would have been if he hadn't mopped it.

She had taken a few minutes before lunch to change into a dress and brush out her hair and spray on perfume. She wasn't sure whether she was really flirting with David, at that point: she was making up to him, flattering him, because that would make everything go smoothly, Helly would be satisfied, and he would at least be kept happy for the afternoon. She could see herself, when she watched the video later, backing away in front of them down the path of their weekend, his and Helly's, clearing it for them with her interest and her attention, helping to damp down David's impatience to be gone.

They went out in the afternoon to look at Bram's project. Bram had been amused that Helly had to change her clothes first; although actually she reappeared in sensible scruffy trousers and shirt, in which she still managed to look spectacular, and it was Clare in her dress who got her legs bitten and scratched in the long grass. They walked around the bay, which would eventually become the marina: now it was low tide and the ruined jetties of the old harbor stood up to their knees in sleek gray glinting mud. Oystercatchers and curlews—Bram pointed them out—picked their fastidious way between them. Across the ring of the bay, the buildings of the city loomed, plate-glass office-block windows flashing whenever the sun flew out from between the ragged slate-colored clouds. It was May, and there was a wind that flattened the mauve-green grass like a pelt and sent it racing in liquid waves; from time to time the sky shook out cold drops of rain. David was taking photographs. Bram left to go and find his group of volunteers, who were counting lugworms farther on. The others climbed down some concrete steps with a rusted handrail and onto a scrap of beach heaped up with stones and sticks and plastic rubbish and cans, which the sea had bleached to the same opaque pale pastel.

As soon as she saw water, Rose began to take her clothes off. She was a willful, huge-eyed baby with rolls of translucent flesh at her wrists and chin and waist, and she despised clothes. She stripped at every opportunity, winter and summer, streaking triumphantly just out of reach of pursuing adults, flashing the long tender crease of her vulva and the pink cheeks of her bottom. Clare worried that Rose's taste for nakedness was outgrowing her innocence—she would be four in a few months—and she thought she needed to be taught to protect herself.

Rose protested that this was the seaside.

"No, it's not, it's dirty water, and you're not to go in it."

Rose seemed to concede defeat. But a few minutes later she was suddenly nowhere to be seen, and there was a little pile of her clothes dropped down beside an oil can with the bottom rusted out and a seagull's wing. It seemed impossible that she could have gone anywhere out of their sight in so short a time. Everyone called her name, looking for her along the beach and back up the steps. The crescendo of dismay, from the first exasperated flutter of worry ("What a pain she is!") to hollow uninhibited panic, took only a few minutes. Clare screamed at the other two children to stay where they were and, kicking off her shoes, ran barefoot across the shingle and the potentially lethal debris of glass and tin to stand soaking her skirt at the scummy edge of the water, shrieking along the shoreline to right and left, fumbling with her arms to feel for anything pulled under and washing in the tide of sluggish brown waves that hardly broke, hardly made spume. She couldn't see through the water. She couldn't think what she ought to do next, whether she should somehow submerge herself in it and try to open her eyes. Wasn't this always how it was, with accidents—the parents tinkered grotesquely, futilely, in the wrong place, failing confusedly, as one fails in dreams?

David shouted for Helly to go one way and he ran the other, back up the steps. Clare felt a passionate revulsion for her guests. It was in her preoccupation with them that she had taken her attention off Rose: she had been talking to David, pretending she was interested in cameras. If Bram had been with them, this would never have happened. Frantically, puritanically, Clare linked up her dereliction with other falsities, with her efforts to impress upon Helly and David the charms of family life, with the perfume she'd sprayed on, with Helly's advertising contract, even with the scorched tinfoil in the bathroom.

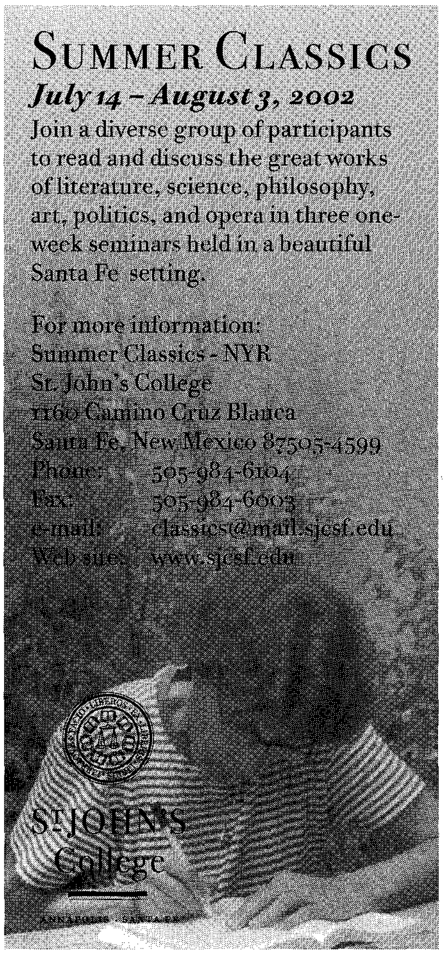
It occurred to her that there was a literary tradition of guilty women whose children pay for their mothers' momentary lapses of attention, their casual betrayals. (In the mornings, when Rose was at the nursery, Clare was writing a Ph.D. thesis on George Sand.) Wasn't there a scene in Flaubert—or Balzac?—where an adulteress watches over the cot of a sick child, pledging the whole of her selfish future happiness against the few degrees that his temperature must come down for him to live? At that moment, Clare imagined such a scene, if it existed, quite without irony, the cheap irony that smirks at literary machinery. It seemed a revelation of a naked truth.

Also, she suddenly, dimly, remembered someone called Tim Dashwood, and odd details of a party she had gone to at his flat when she was a teen-ager: a plastic armchair pocked with cigarette burns, the suspect slickness of a greasy carpet under bare dancing feet, men with ponytails and slow-burning smiles who brought her and Helly drinks in plastic cups and didn't even bother to learn their names. Like good little girls, they swallowed and smoked everything that was put in front of them. The slow black ink mushroom-clouding in her mind came back to her, a fearful sensation of cold deep water slipping past, tugging the ground out from under her. All sorts of things could have happened to them—did happen to them—at those parties. She splashed out of the water and ran along the shoreline, staggering with the pain in her feet, shouting for Rose.

A high sheer stone wall came down into the water, too high for Rose to have climbed. Clare ran back up the beach alongside it, her breath coming jaggedly in sobs, and stopped to peer into a tunnel that pierced the wall, wide enough for a child to crawl into: it was dark and foul inside, with nameless black shapes half submerged in an oily puddle, but no Rose. Clare became convinced again that she was being dangerously distracted from the real disaster, which was happening somewhere else, and she ran back down to the sea.

David found Rose. She was quite unhurt and only thirty yards from where they had been standing and shouting, hidden from them by a grassy bluff. Afterward, Clare made him show her the place, at the back of the beach, where a wet trickle that might have been a stream and might have been sewage emerged from a big concrete pipe set into an earth bank. Rose had been dabbling her feet where the water spilled over the lip of the pipe. She might have been contemplating crawling up into the pipe; and possibly, if it had rained (as it proceeded to do shortly after she was found), there might have been a rush of water off the land. But these dangers were too remote to count, or even to produce any retrospective jolt of horror at a tragedy narrowly skirted. The only one hurt was Clare, who had cut her foot on something in the water.

David looked funny—improbable—holding a pink naked baby, balancing her as he picked his way down the beach, wary and concentrated. Rose clung on with her arms round his neck. Clare had known, all the time they were looking for Rose, that if anything bad—anything sickeningly terrible—had happened she would never have seen either of them again, David or Helly. There would have been a few hours of unspeakable practicalities with doctors and police, they would have got out of it as soon as they decently could and driven back to London in their special Citroën that rose up on its wheels when you started it, and Clare would never, ever, in the remainder of her ruined life have been able to forgive them their association with that day. But now they were all reprieved; now she could like these friends again and smile at them. David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was pleased with himself for having found Rose, and he tickled her awkwardly on the cheek; she held on as he handed her over, and Clare, up close, felt the friendly heat of him. Now she would be able to tell Bram that they had lost Rose, and it would mean only an ordinary manageable hitch in the day. He would not be able to see through it to any deep dereliction, any dangerous absence of mind.

Helly put her cardigan around Clare's shoulders as the rain came pattering in dark spots on the stones, and tried to help her get Rose dressed, pulling tight socks on the wet feet, a T-shirt on the twisting little body.

"You're a naughty, naughty girl," Clare said. "You mustn't take your clothes off, and you mustn't wander away. Mummy was seriously frightened."

Helly looked abashed at what the moment had unleashed in Clare, the excess of reaction. It *was* excessive, Clare supposed—all that shrieking and thrashing about in the water, and the cut foot, which was bleeding now into her shoe. But she felt rather recklessly as if she'd shown Helly something, something that she couldn't have known about, being childless.

Clare sat with her knees drawn up under her chin on her big unmade brass bed, opposite Helly, who was cross-legged at the pillow end. She had bathed her cut with antiseptic and checked that her tetanus injection was still up-to-date (Bram kept meticulous records of these things). Her foot was aching. David had taken Coco and Lily out for a drive in his car, "to leave the girls to talk," as he put it. Rose was asleep in her cot.

"So, what's he like?" Clare asked.

"He's nice," Helly said. "Nicer probably than you'd think. He can seem a bit full of himself."

"I like him better than the last one."

A little involuntary spasm of pain and regret twisted Helly's expression. "Everyone but me could see it. But David's much more steady, don't you think?"

Clare thought of him finding Rose. "Yes," she said. "He seems kind. And sensible."

"I know he shows off a bit."

"Not in the least," Clare protested stoutly. "He's just exuberant. He knows how to enjoy himself."

"Oh, yes. He certainly knows that."

Helly thoughtfully closed her teeth on the cuff of her shirtsleeve and pulled at it, not meeting Clare's eyes, sharing some joke with herself. Bram thought it was just a sensible shirt; Clare had recognized something expensive and perfect of its kind, all the better for being casual and crumpled.

Clare stiffened. "Meaning?"

"Oh, you know. . . . Do you remember Moments of Beauty?"

This was private jargon from a game they had played when they were teenagers: winding pop videos and films backward and forward to isolate the "moment of beauty" for their favorite male stars, the summation of what melted and undid them, some grin, some sleepy inadvertent glance, some lazy look of sexual appraisal. They had even tried for a while to isolate their own moments of beauty in the mirror, so as to work on them.

"Well?"

"David's very good, sexually. You couldn't really know him—I mean, what's so appealing about him—without knowing that. It's his moment."

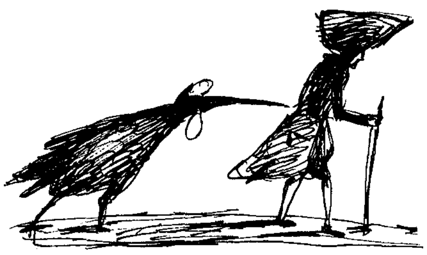
Clare braced herself against the end of the bed. She felt caught out in the very scene of her decent connubial satisfactions: the duvet cover they sat on was faded and flowery, and its fasteners were missing so that innards of gray duvet spilled out of one end. One of Rose's Teddies lay between the pillows with an air of baleful occupation, and for some reason Clare was visited by a memory of Bram calling out to her in the bathroom not to run the tap while she was cleaning her teeth because it wasted water.

"I see," she said.

"We do all kinds of things I never thought I'd do."

"Oh? Such as?"

"Well. Mirrors."



"You mean mirrors on the ceiling and that kind of thing?"

"And cameras."

"Oh, God, Helly, that's awful."

"No, really, it's not." Helly laughed.

"But it's so cold! I just don't think that would give me any pleasure, thinking about it and setting about it in that deliberate kind of way."

"You'd be surprised."

"Isn't it supposed to just happen spontaneously? Isn't there something wrong if you have to plan for it?"

"He just naturally likes women," Helly said. "You think you can take that for granted—I mean, under the circumstances—but, believe me, I'm beginning to realize that lots of men don't like women, whatever they say. . . . Really, it's special, he has this look. . . . I can always tell when he likes someone. And we've done three in a bed."

Clare genuinely shrank in disapproval from all this: even talking about it seemed a betrayal of what she believed was her grownup self, watching over the kind of sacred bedroom secrets that decent grownup couples share. At the same time, she was seized with a curiosity as urgent as a cramp.

"With another woman?"

"Yes."

"God, Helly. What was that like?"

"Oh, well, you know—strange and familiar. You ought to try it."

"No, thank you. I'm quite happy as I am."

"Do you know what I found the other day?" Helly said suddenly, with a blithe quick laugh. "I found a little box of earrings."

"Earrings?"

"Among David's things. Just single earrings. At first I thought maybe he had had his ear pierced at some point. But some of these just weren't that sort of earring, not the kind that a man would wear."

"So where do you think they came from?"

"I think he collected them. In the past. From other women. As souvenirs."

"How many were there?"

"I didn't want to count. I don't know. Quite a lot: they were all in a tangle together. I put them back and I haven't looked at them again."

"I'm sure it doesn't matter," Clare said. "As you say, it was probably all years ago. But aren't you afraid of AIDS and things?"

"It's all right," Helly said lightly. "I made him be tested."

There is a minute or two on the video where Toby catches David sitting alone in the front room in the not-so-comfortable chair. David looks up at him and then away again, absorbed in thinking about something. He's photogenic; all those things about him that seem exaggerated and over-eager in the flesh—the hard curved cheekbones, the spiky thick hair, the big mouth—are toned down by the camera. Clare rewinds the video. (This is weeks later, when Toby sends her a copy of his final version.) She likes his smile, the lazy look he gives Toby, lids half closed, eyebrows raised, long cheeks in shadow. She rewinds it because she can't work out what he's doing in there. This is after he brings the children back from their trip in his special car. (Lily came in full of tales about how he made the car dance, taking his foot on and off the brake in time to the music on his stereo. Coco was disgusted at his showing off. Only Rose really liked him—she had chosen him, there on the beach, Rose the child Clare thinks of as most like herself.) Helly is in the kitchen helping Clare get supper ready (only not helping much). Bram is taking a shower. The children are on the stairs, playing something noisy that involves tipping out all the contents of the toy basket.

David is looking at her books. He isn't looking at them as a reader might, getting close to see the titles, pulling them out and opening them up. He isn't a reader—she's already worked that out. He's just sitting with his head thrown back and one leg propped across the other, surveying her books with a kind of thoughtful smile as if putting together some idea of the sort of person who might want to read all these, someone whose life was hidden under these covers.

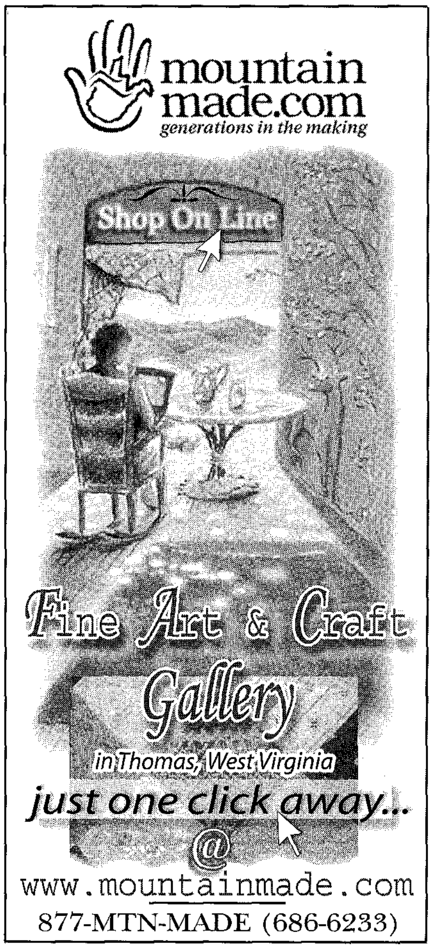
Clare feels slightly uneasy, and amused, watching him looking. He may, of course, have completely the wrong idea of what is in her books. People who don't read often imagine that a life lived with books is serenely truthful, perhaps rather idealistic, elevated to a higher sphere above the trickeries and treacheries of real life. Combined with the children, and the little house without a television, and the making of her own bread and the salting of lemons, the books may make him think she is wholesome and sane. He may think that he is much more devious than she is.

Three days after the visit, an envelope came in the post addressed to Clare. Bram had left for work, and she was on her way to take the kids to school, pinning Rose down in her pushchair to fasten her straps. She didn't recognize the handwriting: she tore it open, shouting at Coco to get his lunchbox. Inside, wrapped in a slip of tissue paper, was a single earring.

As soon as she got home from delivering the children, she dug out an old jewel box she kept in a drawer in her bedroom (the box had been her grandmother's and had once played music); it held a jumble of souvenirs and junk, museum tickets, suitcase keys, bills from cafés that she and Bram had been to in Venice and Stockholm, picture hooks, the tassel from an old embroidered belt. She scrabbled in the mess of tarnished or damaged jewelry and drawing pins at the bottom of the box and found the earring that matched the one she had been sent. It was black, of course, gothic black and silver: to go with the lipstick and the nails.

She would never have recognized him. It was only then that she really remembered what had happened at that party of Tim Dashwood's. Remembered something, anyway: some hasty, probably bungled thing on someone's sleeping bag under a poster of Gregory Isaacs. She burned now to think of it.

David had never given any sign, all weekend, that he remembered. If he had said anything, or even looked significantly at her, then the whole thing might have been only funny or embarrassing. As it was, the broken talisman that had been restored (that's how Clare thought of it—she kept the two earrings far apart from each other in different hiding places) seemed to have an occult power to frighten and excite her, so that for a while she simply didn't know what would happen to her next, or what she might do. ♦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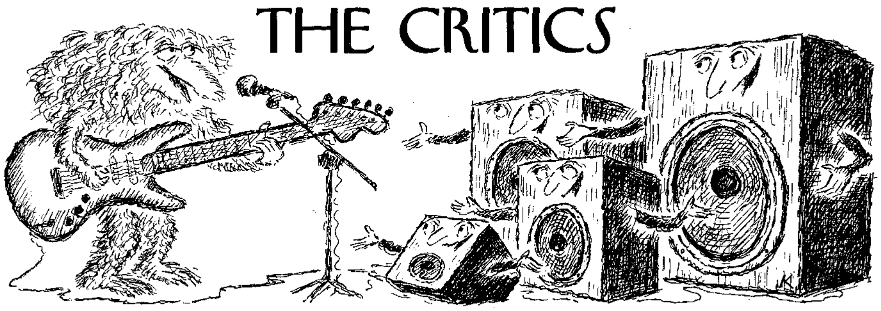

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

WHISTLING IN THE DARK

Schoenberg's unfinished revolution.

BY ALEX ROSS

The Arnold Schoenberg Center, in Vienna, is a scholarly shrine to the man who invented what is still known, after almost a hundred years, as "modern music." How the center ended up in Vienna, Schoenberg's native city, is a curiously tangled tale. Until recently, the composer's archives had resided at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where he lived from 1936 until his death, in 1951. He had fled to America when the Nazis came to power, and expected his legacy to remain here. In 1995, however, his American heirs declared that U.S.C. had failed to honor the legacy—among other things, the Schoenberg Institute was being employed for non-Schoenbergian purposes, such as "Introduction to Concert Music"—and they decided to take it elsewhere. When legal complications ensued, the family retained a young attorney named Randol Schoenberg, whose father was Judge Ronald Schoenberg, of Brentwood, whose father was the composer. (Randol, Ronald, Arnold: there is a pattern.) Perhaps U.S.C. should have expected a tougher fight from a lawyer who had written an undergraduate thesis on combinatorial set theory before going on to represent Michael Jackson, but, in any event, the archive was soon on its way to Vienna, which offered de-luxe facilities and an annual subsidy of about a million dollars. The Master's spirit now rests in splendor at the Palais Fanto, on the Schwarzenbergplatz, not far from Gustav Mahler's old apartment.

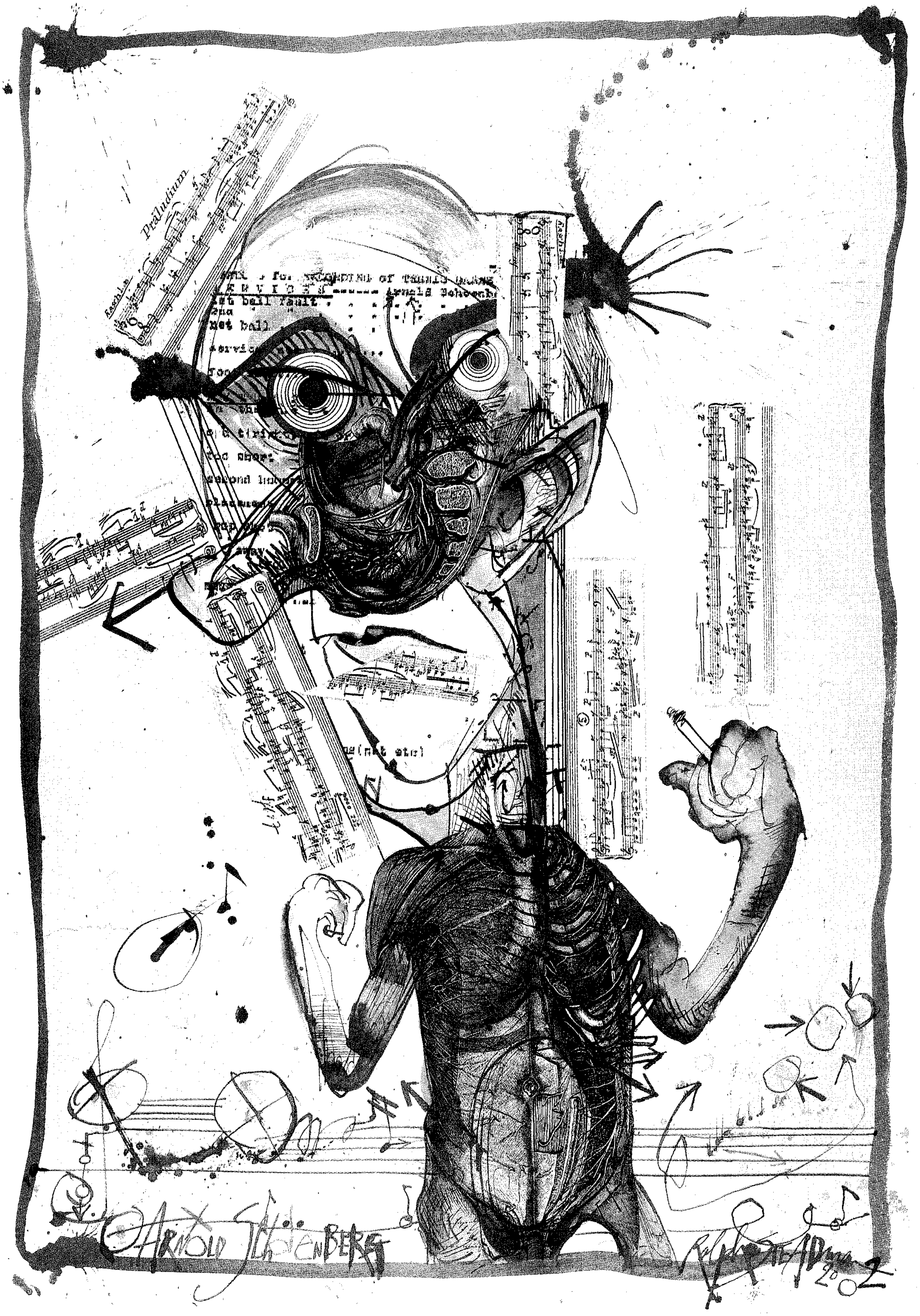
I visited the center last year and was given permission to spend a couple of days looking around the archive. Everywhere, you could feel the presence of a blazingly powerful mind. Schoenberg made his mark on all that he touched, whether it was music theory, painting, carpentry, or tennis. (He devised a symbolic system for transcribing tennis matches.) The smallest scraps of paper in the archive glow with the embers of his personality, which was bright, biting, lonely, and confident. That last word is probably the most important one. The manuscripts are clean and swift, as if written in a trance; the music is murderous in its newness. Of the century's modernist revolutions, Schoenberg's invention of atonality was the most viscerally shocking. When you first encounter the sound of Schoenberg, you may feel yourself violently pushed back, as if a mass of ugliness were crystallizing in the air. The next time, you may feel yourself unconsciously pulled in, as if a beautiful vacuum were enveloping you. You are likely to find yourself perpetually tugged in one direction or the other. You will, however, begin to hear music differently.

Schoenberg always hated the word "atonality," protesting that he was simply offering tonality of a less familiar kind. Nonetheless, what set his music apart was its moratorium on common chords—the major and minor triads that underlie Western music from Monteverdi to Mahler (not to mention almost all pop music). His melodies abandoned the steady, stepwise pattern of the seven-note major and minor scales and instead explored the almost limitless permutations of the twelve-note chromatic scale (think of all the black and white keys between two C's on a piano). For fifteen years, Schoenberg explored this unknown landscape with no theory to guide him. In the early nineteen-twenties, however, he devised the "twelve-tone" system, in which each work is based on a preset arrangement of the twelve chromatic notes. This music was intensely alienating to audiences early on, and it still has the power to send listeners scurrying for the exits. But it added an entirely new set of colors to the palette of sound, and everyone from Puccini to Miles Davis felt its impact.

In one room of the Schoenberg Center is a gigantic CD player that contains recordings of the composer's complete works. As an academic cocktail party went on around me, I put on earphones and began listening to Schoenberg's compositions from the revolutionary years 1908 and 1909. The composer's abrupt departure into atonality comes in the middle of his Second Quartet, which begins in F-sharp minor and sounds for a little while like a chamber piece by César Franck. Then, in the third and fourth movements, a soprano joins the quartet to sing two Stefan George poems, and the rapture of the words—"Kill the longing, close the wound . . . I am only a roaring of the holy voice"—causes harmony almost to dematerialize before one's ears. It is like those early Kandinskys in which a cannon or a horse hovers in the middle of glowing abstract blobs, but this Kandinsky changes as you look at it, so that the horse is there one moment and gone the next.

Schoenberg was also a theorist, essayist, and polemicist, generating some six thousand pages of writing on every subject imaginable. When he wasn't addressing such things as pumpernickel, highway interchanges, and Zionism, he was asserting the composer's right to find his own path and the audience's obligation to follow him. If the audience failed to hold up its end of the bargain, so be it: better to be pure than popular. "Called upon to say something about my public," he wrote, "I

In a messianic effort to regenerate music, Schoenberg saw himself as a prophet who "stood alone against a world of enemies."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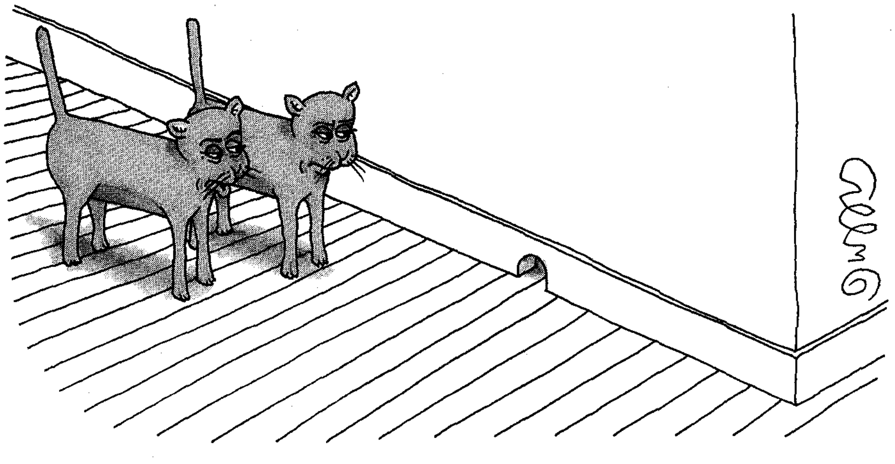
have to confess: I do not believe I have one." And, "If I must commit artistic suicide, I must live by it." And, "If it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art." Sometimes Schoenberg's ferocity is hair-raising. In a collection of correspondence with Alma Mahler, I found a letter dated August, 1914, in which he praised the German cause and denounced the music of Bizet, Stravinsky, and Ravel. "Now we will throw these mediocre kitschmongers into slavery," he wrote, "and teach them to venerate the German spirit and to worship the German God."

In the hundred years that have passed since Schoenberg's first premières, his reputation has undergone considerable fluctuation. His intellectual influence probably peaked in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when twelve-tone composition became an orthodoxy in American university music departments. On the European scene, Pierre Boulez declared that any musician who had not experienced the necessity of Schoenberg's methods was "USELESS." Even Stravinsky and Copland, of the competing neo-classical school, eventually adopted them. But in subsequent years the twelve-tone system became horrifyingly complex in its theoretical elaborations, and younger composers proposed so many rival modes of working outside tonality that contemporary-music festivals began to resemble linguistics conferences. The true revolution of the postwar era arrived with minimalism, which triumphantly reaffirmed the old, wicked chords.

Schoenberg's reputation with the public has followed a different curve, one that is slowly creeping upward. For decades, audiences have contended with what might be called the crazy-noise factor—the feeling that this undoubtedly significant music is too harsh on the ears. Lately, many first-rank musicians, among them Maurizio Pollini, James Levine, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Emanuel Ax, have embraced Schoenberg's works and bathed them in fresh color. A previous generation of advocates said, in essence, that the music is ugly because life is like that; the new generation says that what appears ugly is actually beautiful, because life is like that, too. The gentrification campaign may have reached its height with a recital by Peter Serkin of the complete piano music, in Alice Tully Hall, in November. I had recently heard another pianist play Schoenberg's Suite and had come away feeling as though I'd swallowed a bad oyster. Serkin made the same music glitter and dance and nearly giggle.

Many listeners still cannot stand Schoenberg. When the Metropolitan Opera presented his "Moses und Aron," in 1999, an elderly woman was heard to mutter, "I survived Auschwitz—I don't have to sit through this." And when the critic Mark Swed recently praised the composer in the Los Angeles *Times*, many readers wrote in to complain. "Schoenberg's rejection of tonality is a profound act of egotism," one wrote. "Can't we please let it die in the twentieth century along with that other great affront to human nature—Communism?" The reader had a point: Schoenberg's ideas are noxious in their grandiosity, chief among them the very idea of the "dissolution of tonality." Yet, just as one can appreciate the power of Marx's thought without becoming a Marxist, one can admire Schoenberg without becoming a Schoenbergian. Indeed, the failure of the ideology behind the music may allow us to hear the music itself for the first time.



"Badges? We don't have to show you no stinkin' badges!"

"Arnold Schoenberg's Journey," by Allen Shawn (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $26), is a stylish guide that will help not only those who have seen the light but also those who have not yet left for Damascus. Shawn, a composer based at Bennington College, is not one to throw around barbs like "useless." Instead, he argues, in a gently persuasive manner, that the composer's time has finally come. "Schoenberg's music is no more 'difficult' than the work of other early twentieth-century modernists such as Kandinsky, Eliot, Kafka, and Joyce," Shawn writes. If Schoenberg seems especially difficult, he adds, the problem lies not with the music but with the briar patch of theory that has grown up around it. "The fantasy, power, songfulness, beauty, and humor of the music itself has been not so much overlooked as rendered secondary to the discussion of it by experts," he writes. He sets up his own argument with a fine joke: "Perhaps Schoenberg's work deserves a more superficial treatment than it has hitherto received."

Schoenberg was born in 1874, to middle-class Jewish parents. He seemed destined for a career in science, but the melee of Viennese music drew him in. He whiled away his spare time in the opera houses and the concert halls, absorbing so much music that he had no need for formal instruction. He moved from a study of the classical rigor of Brahms to an immersion in the romantic grandeur of Wagner. Plotting his ascension cannily, he befriended both Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, the leading composer-conductors of the day. In other words, he did not lack worldly ambition. The popular image of him as a humorless investigator of mathematical arcana entirely misses the mark. Even the august Mahler was subject to his slashing wit, which tended to strike home with a minimum of words. Years later, in California, an American student submitted a piece whose galloping rhythms Schoenberg seemed to find banal. His verdict was "Hi ho, Silver!"

He was a bony but athletic man with a shining bald dome and extraordinarily bright eyes. He easily attracted attention

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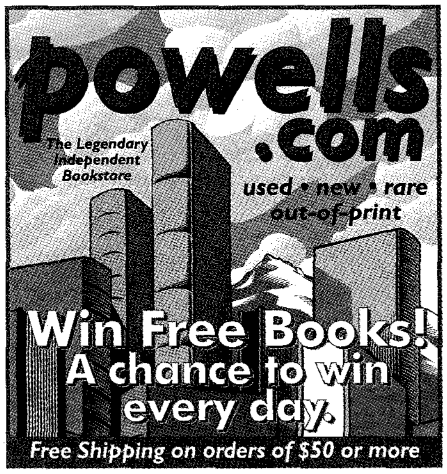
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in Vienna's café culture, and made alliances with figures such as Karl Kraus and Adolf Loos, who shared Schoenberg's contempt for the Viennese bourgeoisie. He had the air of a prophet or a lay preacher, and tried out various religious convictions. Although he was brought up in the Jewish faith, he converted to Lutheranism in 1898 and also dabbled in Swedenborgian mysticism. The occult tendencies of the day led him to the ritualistic poetry of Stefan George, who had gathered a cult of disciples around him in Munich and devoted his mature years to the deification of a fifteen-year-old boy. Schoenberg echoed George in the lordly way he treated his students Alban Berg and Anton Webern, who wasted large portions of their abbreviated lives writing grovelling letters to him and fulfilling mundane tasks. Yet Schoenberg had an extraordinary power to focus young minds, and it is doubtful that Berg would have been able to produce anything remotely like "Wozzeck" or "Lulu" without his mentor's example.

Until 1906 or so, Schoenberg's music had been typical of its time, even a touch conservative. Its dissonances were sometimes searing, but no more so than in contemporary works by Strauss or Pfitzner. A love of contrapuntal rigor was balanced by a knack for painterly stillness; his two early masterpieces, the string sextet "Transfigured Night" and the epic song cycle "Gurrelieder," were notable for their episodes of suspended animation, in which simple chords rotated ethereally. The composer seemed to be hesitating at a fork in the road, between hypercomplexity and a kind of minimalist purity. Shawn observes that the first minutes of "Gurrelieder" sound more modern and more daring than the chromatic writing that follows. "These passages are not simply tonal," he writes. "They are visions of tonality by someone who already senses that there are musical alternatives."

Such spells of rapture assisted in the greatest triumph of Schoenberg's life, the 1913 première of "Gurrelieder." The piece had been sketched in 1900 and 1901 but the orchestration was not complete until 1911, by which time Schoenberg had rejected tonality. The première was therefore a somewhat awkward occasion, at which the composer won wild acclaim for a style of late-romantic music which he no longer practiced. "I was rather indifferent, if not even a little angry," he later said. The prolonged applause did not make up for the abuse that he had previously suffered at the hands of audiences and critics. In fact, he felt more alienated than ever: "I stood alone against a world of enemies."

Five weeks after the "Gurrelieder" première, Schoenberg presented a second concert, at which more recent and radical works by him, Berg, and Webern were performed. In Berg's "Über die Grenzen," or "Beyond the Bounds," the twelve tones of the chromatic scale sounded simultaneously, as if all the strings on a piano were being made to vibrate without any of the keys being struck. In response, the audience screamed bloody murder. There were scuffles, and the police were called. A Dr. Albert accused a Herr Buschbeck of having boxed him on the ears. Their subsequent lawsuit was reported in the Viennese papers with more assiduousness than the concert itself. A disturbing fact emerged: the dominant reaction of the audience had been one of amusement. "The public laughed," the operetta composer Oscar Straus testified. "And I openly confess, sir, that I laughed, too, for why shouldn't one laugh at something genuinely comical?"

Throughout this chaos, Schoenberg never wavered in his conviction that he was on the right path. He immersed himself in ever more otherworldly visions, reaching the apogee of refinement in the Four Orchestral Songs, Opus 22, which are rarely performed because they require a huge orchestra to play with immense precision and restraint. The first song, based on Ernest Dowson's poem "Seraphita," as translated by George, tells of a voyage through storms to a place of serenity. Just before the First World War, Schoenberg set about composing a choral symphony, which faltered amid the difficulties of controlling the new language. He fell silent for several years as he worked out the underpinnings of the twelve-tone system.

The early atonal scores—the Second Quartet, "Pierrot Lunaire," "Erwartung," the Five Pieces for Orchestra, the various short pieces for piano—remain his most startling achievements. In the beginning, atonality was, for Schoenberg, a way of simplifying. Shawn reproduces the entire score for the second piece of the Six Little Piano Pieces, Opus 19: there are nine bars of music and a very spare smattering of a hundred and two individual notes. The dominant sound is what Shawn calls the "drip-drip-drip" of the interval of a third—here the notes G and B. "This piece plays with thirds—the old building blocks of traditional harmony—as if they were a set of child's toy blocks," he writes. The music is startling in its spareness and lightness.

Setting aside the question of the harmonic language, everything about this piece is new: its form, its look, its feel. Even the brevity is an attack on the usual concert experience, at which you expect a work of music to bid for your attention and draw you into an evolving story. Instead, this is a hard object, like a painting on a wall. You can't sit back and wait for something to happen; you have to be alert and engaged, circling the object, stepping back for an appraisal, leaning in for a closer look. With the second piece of Opus 19, you come to realize that the entire picture is defined by two repeated strokes, the unchanging G and B. Two-thirds of a G-major chord, they at first give off a warm hum, but there is something odd about the way they refuse to react to the wisps of sound that trail around them. They are like two eyes staring ahead, never moving, never blinking.

Documents in the Schoenberg Center suggest that the composer conceived atonal music as an irrational, quasi-mystical act. He asked Alma Mahler to listen only for "colors, smells, lights, sounds, movements, glances, gestures." This remains the best advice for any listener. But the implacable hostility that greeted these pictures in sound impelled Schoenberg to rationalize his new language, and this, really, is where the trouble started. In 1909, Schoenberg began to issue musical polemics, all of them brilliantly worded and most of them at odds with common sense. This composer had an almost infantile contrarian streak—he was "a curious mixture of the most childish impulses and the most sublimated intellectuality," one observer said—and he tended to respond to any criticism with an exaggeration of his own position. Thus, when his new language was criticized as irrational, he replied that it was in fact normal, inevitable, and irreversible.

Schoenberg's first major manifesto came in the deceptively innocuous form of a harmony text—"Harmonielehre," published in 1911. His argument was not so much on behalf of atonality as against tonality: the old order, Schoenberg said, was an artificial construct that had to die. In retrospect, the statement is absurd, given the vast quantity of major- and minor-key music that has been composed in the past hundred years. But Schoenberg supported it by holding to severe scholastic definitions. He saw tonality exclusively as a journey away from and back toward a home key; this is a satisfying description of the Viennese classics, but it fails to do justice to contemporaneous works by Debussy, Strauss, Mahler, and Stravinsky, which wander rapidly from one key to another, sometimes inhabit several keys at once, and often fail to end up in the same key in which they began. Theirs was a new kind of tonality, to which the old rules did not apply. (The rigidity of Schoenberg's thinking shows in his "correction" of a famous moment in Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony, in which the horn enters in E-flat while the rest of the orchestra is in B-flat. Schoenberg said that Beethoven had made a slip of the pen.)

In later sections of "Harmonielehre," Schoenberg abandons analysis in favor of lurid rhetoric. He announces that contemporary music has become a diseased, degenerate world in need of a cleansing solution. The tonal system, he says, has given in to "inbreeding and incest." Romantic chords such as the diminished seventh are "hermaphroditic," "vagrant," and "cosmopolitan." "The end of the system is brought about with such inescapable cruelty by its own functions. . . . The juices that serve life serve also death." There is something creepy about this language. It is reminiscent of Otto Weininger's "Sex and Character" and other pseudo-scientific diatribes of the era. If you replace the idea of tonality with the idea of race, you would have something close to an anti-Semitic tract. Although Schoenberg in later life was unremitting in his opposition to Hitler, and he returned to Judaism in 1933, his writings were not free of the messianic, apocalyptic mentality of turn-of-the-century Vienna—an environment that Karl Kraus called "the laboratory of world destruction."

If Schoenberg thought that his new language would transform music in a

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whirlwind, he realized, by the nineteen-twenties, that the revolution would be slow in coming, if it came at all. He did not lack for recognition—in 1926, he took up an illustrious professorship at the Prussian Academy of Arts, in Berlin—but his movement was only one of many in the confused landscape of the time. Neoclassicism, futurism, the “new objectivity,” and “music for use” all had their own manifestos. Now Schoenberg began to present himself not as an innovator but as a conservator, a caretaker of tradition. Despite the absence of conventional chords, atonality would be the medium in which the old strategies of thematic development and counterpoint would be preserved. His new means of expression was the twelve-tone system, which he introduced in the early twenties, in the Suite for Piano and the Serenade for baritone and chamber ensemble.

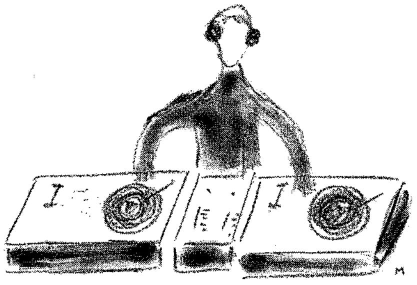
In the early atonal period, Schoenberg’s models were Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss. Now, in the twelve-tone period, he emulated Bach and Brahms. Toward the end of his Berlin years, Schoenberg gave a lecture entitled “Brahms the Progressive,” in which he drew attention to the older composer’s habit of endlessly working over short themes—what he elsewhere called the technique of “developing variation.” This continual playing around with the intervals between notes—forward, backward, upside down—would serve as the logical substitute for the old relationships of tonality. It became the basis for twelve-tone music, in which the row of twelve was often broken down into eminently variable, Brahmsian units of four or six.

It is interesting, however, to look at Brahms’s own account of the art of variation. He said in his letters that the bass line of a given theme is “sacred,” is the “firm footing on which I then build my tales,” and that variation itself is “merely playing around.” (He also said that he worked with short themes because he had trouble thinking of long ones.) The elimination of tonality, and, with it, the bass lines on which tonality rests, might result in an art that consisted entirely of “merely playing around.” It would be like a building whose basic structure had been removed, so that only the façade remained. Perhaps Schoenberg’s art is, in the end, entirely ornamental—the vanishing point of aestheticism.

The finest twelve-tone works—the Serenade, the Septet-Suite, the Third and Fourth Quartets, the String Trio—afford a mesmerizing, looking-glass perspective on Viennese tradition. In ideal performances, they achieve a lighter-than-air quality. They begin to make sense not on the first or second hearing but on the ninth or tenth. The twelve-tone method was really an expression of Schoenberg’s horror of repetition, his need always to go churning on to the next thing. The listener has to do the repeating; after a number of attempts, a chord here or a pattern there sticks in the memory, so that a landscape of seemingly random features suddenly becomes familiar, as if glimpsed in childhood.

You might think, listening to these pristine, orderly constructions, that Schoenberg’s messianic impulse to dictate musical life had died away. On the contrary: it now reached its height. From 1930 to 1932, he worked on his operatic masterpiece, “Moses und Aron,” which is at once a Biblical story and a parable of music in the twenties. Moses is Schoenberg himself, bringing the tables of atonality down from the mountain, while Aaron, the well-meaning brother who abandons God for the worship of the Golden Calf, is a composer like Kurt Weill, who had started out as a Schoenberg enthusiast and then embraced music for the masses. “You have betrayed . . . the extraordinary to the commonplace,” Moses thunders to Aaron, sounding more like a critic than a prophet. The music of “Moses” supplies a good approximation of the voice of God, but the libretto is marred by that excess of righteous rage which ran through Schoenberg’s thought from beginning to end.

In 1933, Schoenberg arrived in America, and his attitudes changed a little. He Americanized himself with surprising alacrity, going so far as to listen to football games on the radio and to adopt



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the expression "Take it easy." In his new home, Los Angeles, he befriended Charlie Chaplin, played tennis with George Gershwin, became the celebrity's celebrity. In 1938, he was invited to present an Oscar for best music (the winner was the Deanna Durbin movie "100 Men and a Girl"), and although he fell ill just before the ceremony, he took pride in the fact that his short speech in praise of film music was read aloud. He entertained the idea of writing for Hollywood himself, and once met with Irving Thalberg at M-G-M. Thalberg had heard "Verklärte Nacht" and had complimented Schoenberg on his lovely music. "I don't write lovely music," Schoenberg snapped. Thalberg asked him to write a score for a film adaptation of "The Good Earth," by Pearl Buck. Schoenberg agreed, on the condition that he receive fifty thousand dollars and control of every aspect of the production, including the pitch levels of the actors' voices. The negotiations faltered.

This story is often cited as an example of Schoenberg's integrity, his unwillingness to sell out. What is not so well known is that he actually made a few sketches for "The Good Earth," among them a sinuous little tune in C. In fact, Schoenberg wrote a number of tonal works after he arrived in America, including a Suite in G. He claimed that they were exercises "in the old style," but they were more than that: they picked up, without a break, the forward-looking tonal language that he had left behind in 1908. He knew as well as anyone that the old river of harmony was flowing on. Most twentieth-century music turned out to be tonal in one way or another. Composers as various as Stravinsky and Messiaen never disavowed common chords, even as they registered Schoenberg's discoveries. Berg, the slavish disciple, gravitated back to the lush harmony of Mahler and Strauss.

"I cannot deny," Schoenberg wrote, "the possibility that as often in the musical past, when harmony has developed to a certain high point, a change will occur which will bring with it entirely different and unexpected things." In other words: "I could be wrong." He also conceded that great composers transcend their times, and with this codicil he was able to endorse such seemingly retrograde figures as Sibelius and Shostakovich. The film composer David Raksin told me that Schoenberg once cut off a colleague who had attacked Shostakovich, saying, "That man is a composer born." How to reconcile the preachings of "Harmonielehre" with the crashing major chords of Shostakovich's Fifth? It can't be done. The twentieth century is a landscape of lonely monoliths, and Schoenberg and Shostakovich seem to reach to about the same height.

For all his self-fulfilling prophecies of isolation, Schoenberg never gave up hope that the triumphant ovations for "Gurrelieder" in Vienna in 1913 might someday be repeated—on his own terms, of course. Near the end of his life, he joked that he expected to live to the age of a hundred and twenty-five and then to experience success. "There is nothing I long for more intensely," he once said, "than to be taken for a better sort of Tchaikovsky. People should know my tunes and whistle them." In the end, this longing for a reconciliation with the public sets Schoenberg apart from postwar followers such as Boulez, Theodor W. Adorno, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who proclaimed total independence from popular taste. Stockhausen said of Schoenberg, "Here was a composer who made it clear to society that he would not allow himself to be kicked about like Mozart." If this were really Schoenberg's main achievement, his music would be worthless. And it is likely that most music written in the Schoenbergian spirit will disappear without a trace.

On a recent trip to Los Angeles, I visited Judge Ronald Schoenberg, now retired, at his home in Brentwood, which is the same house in which the composer spent the last years of his life. The younger Schoenberg, who has his father's keen, bulging eyes, recalled that a tour bus used to come up the street, and a guide's amplified voice would point out the house of Shirley Temple, who lived nearby. The announcer always neglected to add that the inventor of twelve-tone music lived a few houses away.

"My father was always sad about that," Schoenberg said. "But another time, when we went out driving, we stopped for orange juice on Highway 1, and we heard 'Verklärte Nacht' coming over a loudspeaker. I never saw him so happy." ♦

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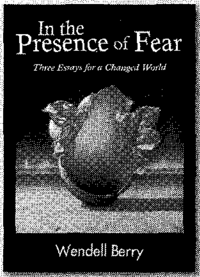

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THE ART WORLD

SURREALISM REVISITED

Heavy breathing at the Met.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"Surrealism: Desire Unbound," which opened last week at the Metropolitan Museum, is an oddly evangelical exhibition. It seeks to renew the appeal of a movement that sprang from the spiritual wreck of Europe after the First World War and sank in the larger catastrophe of the Second. This is a tall order, given the relative meagreness of canonical Surrealist art. Limp clocks by Salvador Dali are about as good as it gets. The curators, led by Jennifer Mundi, of the Tate Modern, in London, where the show originated, and the many scholars who contributed essays to an ambitious catalogue cope with this by casting a wide net. The show encompasses paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, collages, and objects—along with masses of books, documents, and ephemera—and includes works by Duchamp, Picasso, Miró, Giacometti, and other major artists who were tangential to the movement. The onslaught promotes Surrealism not as a style but as a web of ideas. The hero of the occasion is a writer—the movement's founder, André Breton. And its selling point is sex.

Breton, who grew up in a provincial family, was a medical student when he served in the First World War as a psychiatric worker, tending shell-shocked soldiers. The fantasy worlds in which some casualties took refuge enthralled him. He was stirred by the ideas of Sigmund Freud, which were then just emerging in France, such as the concept of hysteria as a coherent expression of repressed trauma. Writing in 1920, Breton called hysteria "one of the most beautiful poetic discoveries of our epoch." Freudian lingo, wielded fast and loose, peppers Surrealist discourse. Continual references to "the unconscious" suggest a place as tangible as, say, The Hague. That supposed repository of forbidden truths gave Breton a base from which to assault a society that he was not alone in loathing. Restive youth gathered in the capitals of Europe. The war-born, bitterly frivolous Dada movement, which mocked all cultural authorities, including itself, had disintegrated, leaving a generation primed for more effective forms of rebellion. The prewar avant-garde's prince, Guillaume Apollinaire, who died of influenza and a combat wound in 1918, had coined the intriguing word "surrealism" in 1917. With the charisma and efficiency of a salon Mussolini, Breton adopted the word, organized a cohort, and promulgated dogma. His tumultuous group, ever gaining converts and shedding apostates, dominated the Paris scene until the German invasion of 1940, from which Surrealism—like the French art world—never recovered, though the movement hung on feebly in France until after Breton's death, in 1966.

"Desire Unbound" begins with prescient prewar paintings by Giorgio de Chirico and proceeds through an assortment of sexually charged Dada works to the first of two artistic peaks: radically innovative semi-abstractions by Miró, Jean Arp, and André Masson. The second peak—paintings by Picasso and sculptures by Giacometti, including his vehement masterpiece "Woman with Her Throat Cut" (1932)—lies ahead between roomfuls of vitrines that document the Surrealists' love lives and their enthusiasm for the Marquis de Sade. First come Dali, Magritte, and other *echt* Surrealist painters; Man Ray photographs; and a segment called "Transgender," which trots out images of cross-dressing by Duchamp and Frida Kahlo. Farther on is a chamber of superb boxes by Joseph Cornell, the suburban idolater of inaccessible beauty, which leads to photographic work of breathtaking perversity by the German artist Hans Bellmer and the too little known female writer-artist Claude Cahun. The show ends in a large, dishearteningly jumbled gallery, surveying Surrealism's decadence in the nineteen-forties, mostly in New York. Wall texts

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abound throughout the show, like subtitles for a language—the visual—that is foreign to the curators' thematic mania.

"Desire Unbound" succeeds in generating impressive quotients of coolly libidinous chic along with a certain air of starchy prurience. (Imagine a Starr Report issued by a committee of fallen librarians.) Leave the kids at home. The show's strong suits are erotic photography and drawing. Its star is Bellmer (1902-75), who lived in Paris after 1938. Bellmer, who collaborated with the French theorist of obscenity Georges Bataille, is darkly fashionable these days in both the art world and academe. Kinkiness, thy name is Bellmer. His signature works are elegant, indelibly shocking photographs of fragmented, anatomically preposterous female dolls that he made of wood, plaster, and papier-mâché. Swollen of breast, belly, pudendum, and thigh, the dolls appear in torturous postures redolent of sadomasochistic rites. Their occasional sporting of white ankle socks and Mary Janes seems silly to me, but you never know what some people deem sacred. Bellmer also made fiercely tidy drawings of orgiastic grapplings. One writer eloquently termed his art "a blend of incredible, pitiless coldness and burning excitement." The writer was his longtime companion—and "victim," in his words—Unica Zürn. She wrote the appreciation several months before her suicide, in 1970.

The disturbing relationship of Bellmer and Zürn is described in a section of the show's catalogue devoted to love among the Surrealists: marriages, adulteries, ménages à trois, daisy-chain affairs. The scorecard of sexual scrimmages goes way beyond gossip, advancing a view of Surrealism as a lived code of anti-conventional ethics and amoralist morality. The editor of the section, Vincent Gille, can be sure of his facts because the Surrealists kept regular records of their amours. Although Breton urged a tell-all policy on his followers, he could be remarkably prudish. His classic autobiographical novel "Nadja" barely mentions his intimacies with its subject, an intoxicating, half-mad girl, and even that hint was suppressed in a later edition. He proscribed male homosexuality. (Only children were scarcer than gays in Surrealist circles. Among the group's implicit topsy-turvy taboos, sex for procreation stood high.) Les-

Man Ray's 1930 photograph of Surrealist cronies, including Georges and Yvette Malkin (kissing) and Robert Desnos (center).

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bianism could be O.K., but preferably as spice on a heterosexual bill of fare. Even while Breton praised the omnisexual, vicious Sade as a prophet of Surrealist freedom, he wrote love poems as tenderly gallant as Provençal minstrelsy. Similarly sweet-tempered—and better—were poems by Paul Éluard and by Robert Desnos, who was famed in the group for his ability to fall asleep at a moment's notice and awaken with a fresh, first-rate dream. French Surrealism left its most enduring creative monuments in lyric poetry.

Surrealism was without doubt sexy. It emerged in the most hot and bothered of climates. Paris in the twenties was a wildly favorable milieu for a young man with a clever pickup line. More than a million Frenchmen had died in the war; many others were left incapacitated. Given the surplus of women, even an ill-favored fellow might pass for a great lover, and if he was a dashing American expatriate like Man Ray, look out. Ray's photographs in the show document an almost monotonous parade of extraordinarily beautiful, smart handmaids of Surrealism. These include his celebrated consorts Kiki de Montparnasse and the photographer Lee Miller. Others with names that still resonate are Nancy Cunard, Elsa Triolet, Yvonne Georges, Nusch (Maria Benz), and the muse's muse Gala (Helena Dimitrovnie Diakonova), who ricocheted from Éluard through a trio with Éluard and Max Ernst to Dali. Only in the movement's waning stages did female artists step forth in any numbers. Their arrival was heralded by the instant sensation of Meret Oppenheim's 1936 "Objet (Le Déjeuner en Fourrure)," better known as the Fur Teacup. (It takes a star turn at the Met.) Aside from the Mexican powerhouse Kahlo, distaff Surrealism didn't amount to much until the gamy efflorescences of New York's own Louise Bourgeois became widely noticed, in the nineteen-seventies.

So was Surrealism one long boys' night out? The men's posturings and shenanigans may easily be seen as competitive displays. But a mighty yen for serious, collective purpose is also apparent. It informed Breton's dogged efforts to square his enterprise with Communism, which he pursued in his magazine of the early thirties, *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution.* The attempted alliance, untenable on both sides, produced much tortured reasoning and led to ruinous schisms. Éluard and the poet Louis Aragon embraced Stalinism. Breton cleaved to Leon Trotsky, with whom he collaborated on a manifesto in Mexico City in 1938. The poet and the doomed ex-commissar excused artists from orthodoxy. They declared that "true art is unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society." This wishful formulation bespeaks Breton's desperation to keep his movement—whose real-world arena was not the street barricade but the rumpled bed—on the sunny side of history. It also helps account for Surrealism's recurrent siren appeal to young artists and intellectuals. The notion of personal imagination as somehow an agent of earthshaking power rode again in the nineteen-sixties, when ingesting a drug could seem like a revolutionary deed.

In the United States, Surrealism has always had an imported aura, like fabulously smelly French cheese. The reason is the Surrealists' particular brand of subversion. They were anti-rational Cartesians and atheistic Catholics. They were thrilled by cultivated absurdities and blasphemies—kicks that tend to be lost on pragmatic Americans. My own trouble with Surrealism, which becomes acute at the Met, centers on that word "desire." The word plays throughout the show and the catalogue like an ineffable perfume. The curator Jennifer Mundi writes that, for the Surrealists, "desire was seen as the authentic voice of the inner self. It was an expression of the sexual instinct, and, in sublimated form, the impulse behind love. It was also a path to self-knowledge." As for love, Breton gassily pronounced it "the sole motivating principle of the world, the only master that humans must recognize." All this heavy breathing suggests feelings so classy that I am impressed right out of feeling them.

A little earthy skepticism can make short work of "Desire Unbound." Surrealist art's line in illustrated dreams has aged badly. Even at its most entertaining, as in Dali, it groans with dated conceits. And it plays false with what proved to be Surrealism's most useful insight: that the mind possesses a deep formality that may assert itself when conscious control is suspended. In Surrealist dream pictures, the discovery process ends before brush touches canvas. The rest is whistle-while-you-work, academic execution. Breton unfortunately prescribed such banality by adopting de Chirico as the model for Surrealist painting. According to one of Surrealism's abiding legends, Breton glimpsed a de Chirico from a moving bus in Paris, in 1916, and was so struck that he walked back to look at it. He later acquired the painting, "The Child's Brain," which depicts a massive and mustachioed but oddly feminized paternal figure confronting a closed yellow book, from which protrudes a thin red ribbon. This work, which is in the show, is terrific in the inimitable de Chirico way of investing spare, bluntly painted scenes with vast portent. No Surrealist painter—least of all the hectic and pedestrian Ernst, who took cues from the sublime Italian—would approach such magic. An exception might be made for the arch philosophical jokes of Magritte, but not by me.

A familiar fixture in the Met's permanent collection—Jackson Pollock's "Pasiphaë" (1945)—delivers the show's biggest jolt. When I encountered this large, pre-drip painting in the last gallery, I felt that I was experiencing it with the astonishment of its first viewer. The painting deploys indistinct human and animal imagery in an august proscenium space of orchestrated violence. Every stabbing brushstroke and surprising color breathes lyrical urgency. The canvas blazes with cumulative energy. Coming upon it after rooms of finicky objects was like exiting an overheated parlor into the Grand Canyon. "Pasiphaë" applies Surrealist principles of impulsive content and impromptu method to painting as an end in itself. Goodbye, Freud. Like other Abstract Expressionists, Pollock preferred Jung, whose psychology posits universal mythic patterns. True or not, that idea helped disperse Surrealism's erotomania and narcissism. Desire was no longer an issue—only conviction mattered. When I reached "Pasiphaë," all that had come before seemed to me a shaggy-dog story meandering to this marvellous punch line. Such is not the curators' intent, of course. (Pollock was unrepresented at the Tate.) They revel in Surrealism's labyrinth of intellectualized sex. Caveat emptor. ♦

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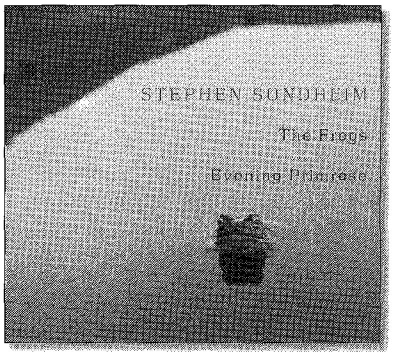

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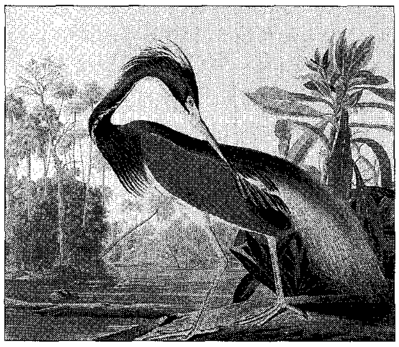

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BOOKS

IF YOU ASK ME

Etiquette through the ages.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

In 1844, one Peter Parley published an etiquette book with a title that cannot be improved upon: "What to Do, and How to Do It." The nineteenth century was the heyday of the genre, although it has been with us since ancient times. The Cumaean Sibyl, like her modern counterparts, counselled the lovelorn, the infertile, the vengeful, the victimized, the credulous, the desperate, and the physically challenged. She also had a large roster of celebrity clients and did the occasional channelling job for a politician. Her do's and don'ts for statesmen were set down in hexameter, and could be consulted only by permission of the Roman Senate. It was she who appeared before King Tarquin offering to sell him her nine books of prophecies for a sum that properly reflected their uniqueness, and which, as I recall, was to be paid in gold. He balked at the price, so she burned the first three books and offered him the remaining six for the same amount. He balked again, and she burned the next three, still refusing him a discount. The outnerved Tarquin gave in. There is less distance than one might suppose between the exaltation of an oracle and her bottom line.

The Sibyl delivered her inspired pronouncements in a sacred frenzy or trance that was possibly drug-induced and for which she would now almost certainly be counter-medicated by a patriarchal mental-health establishment. By the Renaissance, the oracle was still a confidante of princes, but the hallucinogenic hanky-panky had been eliminated. Baldassare Castiglione, the author of "The Book of the Courtier" (1528), offered lofty yet sensible advice on war, fashion, love, statecraft, and small talk. While he encouraged such refined manly recreations as playing tennis and running bulls, he counselled his readers against turning cartwheels or tightrope walking.

As the republican revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave the social fabric a new horizontal stretch, advice on conduct became a growth industry, dominated by men in black: unimpeachably sober preachers and pedagogues. The Puritans, of course, were the most tireless of self-improvers. A number of their tracts address nose-blowing and nail-biting. Another hectors the rowdy falconers who were bringing their birds to church. In the worldlier upper reaches of Colonial American society, it was chic to be the author of a "courtesy book," and George Washington himself penned a hundred and ten "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation," including "Sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum with your fingers or feet." But the etiquette manual as we know it—a primer on style and propriety written for an anxious, nouveau-riche reader by a confident grande dame of impeccable social credentials—arose with the genteel aspirations of the urban middle class.

Ours is an age of fluid boundaries and of a drastically lowered general threshold of embarrassment, so one might suppose that the genre would be obsolete. Luckily for its practitioners, the general threshold of common sense has declined just as drastically, even as the market for advice has become more diversified. The repressed millions who suffer from feeling overcivilized and denatured must be taught how to assert themselves in bed, at the office, or with their in-laws. The barbaric multitudes must be counselled on bridling their narcissistic urges. Those caught in the middle need help with private-school interviews, senile parents, and fish forks.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

But certain principles of polite behavior are immutable. For Jane Austen, as for the inestimable Emily Post, who published her great opus in 1922, and for Miss Manners, that most charming and excellent lady—the only contemporary writer on the subject of etiquette who deserves to be mentioned in the same sentence with them—there is little measurable difference between moral rightness and social correctness: both are aspects of a higher virtue known as civility.

It is perhaps by now obvious that I am an incurable know-it-all myself. This deplorable tendency was first observed by my fifth-grade teacher, who dubbed me Miss Importance, and by the mothers of my childhood friends, who trembled at the phrase "Judy says," usually uttered in defiance of their own better judgments. Time has chastened my pretensions, or most of them, which never had a pedigree. I grew up in a lower-middle-class Queens neighborhood, and the most esoteric cultural advantage I derived from it is that of knowing the rush-hour shortcuts to both New York airports. My interest in the finer points of etiquette dates from the early nineteen-seventies, when I shared a flat in London with a rebel deb who worked as the roadie for a rock group. "Don't worry," she told me, the first time I was invited to spend a weekend at her titled parents' Georgian manor in Kent. "As you are both left-handed and American, no one will expect you to have any manners at all."

Etiquette isn't quite as unstable as fashion—it changes at about the rate that men's clothes do—but not long ago a friend in her twenties, whose roommate was planning a formal wedding, solicited my advice on a predicament Mrs. Post never had to face. The bride's parents were divorced; her mother had remarried and her father was undergoing but had not yet completed gender-reassignment surgery, and was living as a woman. How should the invitation be worded? Mrs. Peyton Place and Ms. Eve (formerly Mr. Adam) deMan request the honour of your presence at the marriage of their daughter, Perdita? Was the father's desire to wear a dress to the ceremony, at which she would be escorting her daughter down the aisle, reasonable and appropriate, even though the groom's family was apoplectic at the prospect? And should that dress be color-coördinated with the outfits of the bride's other attendants?

I thought to consult the recently published American edition of "Debrett's New Guide to Etiquette & Modern Manners" (St. Martin's; $27.95), by the late John Morgan, which covers almost every imaginable contingency at a civil or religious service in the United Kingdom, managing deftly to convey disapproval of pregnant brides, improvised vows, thermographed invitations, cameras in church ("Every little human act seems to require instant *reportage*"), and "humanist" commitment rites, especially those performed aboard hot-air balloons. Mr. Morgan is fastidiously ecumenical, but he does note, rather oddly, "Don't expect ethnic dress at a Jewish wedding." Does he think his readers might harbor expectations of sandalled virgins bearing water jugs? One learns, however, that British matrimonial law is considerably more restrictive than our own. According to Mr. Morgan, having gender-reassignment surgery does not circumvent the English ban on "same-sex" unions. But he has nothing on formal wear for a member of the wedding who is between sexes.

Any closed society, high or low, has codes of behavior that serve to distinguish outsiders from initiates. We pass through Customs to enter a foreign port in more senses than one. The charm of the best etiquette and conduct manuals is that they are a form of travel literature—Baedekers that explain the local currency and exotic native practices of a place, an era, or a class to which one does not belong, and they make entertaining reading even for a homebody. Knowing or caring to know that it is correct to eat asparagus with one's fingers and a ripe peach with a knife and fork does not automatically make one a snob. The word "snob," by the way, has not always meant someone who looks down upon his "inferiors." He was once someone who was looked down upon by his "betters." Some etymologists believe that the word is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase *sine nobilitate*, without nobility, and that before the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century it was used on ships' manifests to suggest which passengers did not deserve to sit at the captain's table; on the footman's list at fashionable parties to indicate that a guest had no

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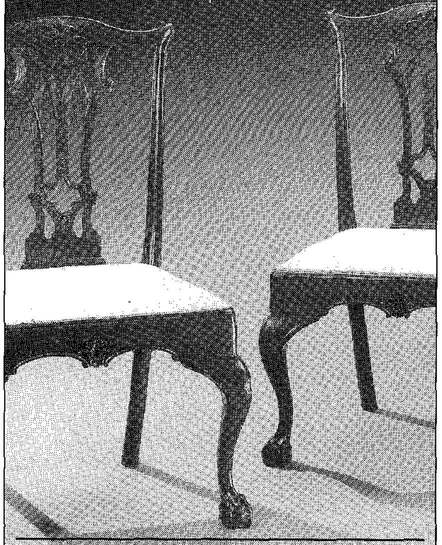

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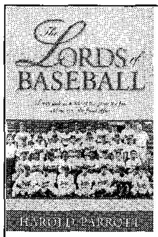

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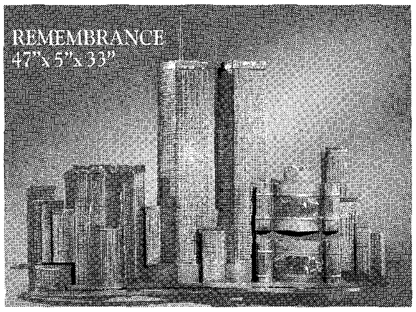

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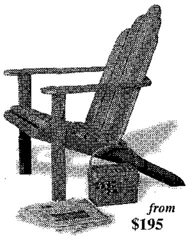
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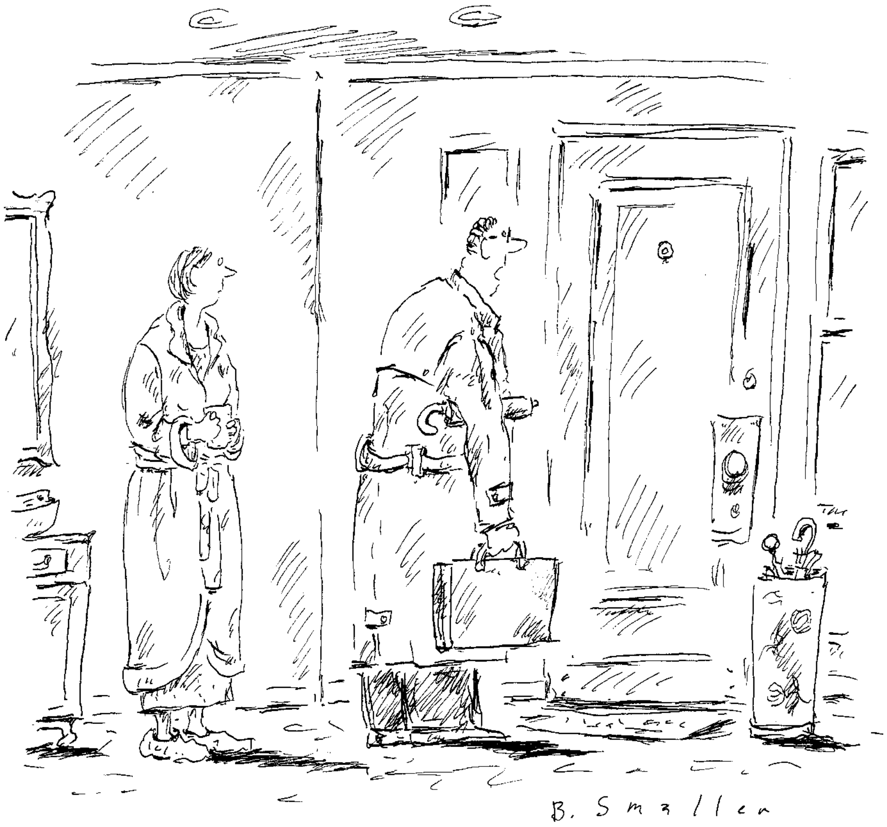
title to announce; or on the student rosters of Oxford and Cambridge, flagging the commoners. The ambitious, ingratiating, and mimetic upstart who worms his way into a patrician milieu was becoming, in the same period, the hero of Romantic fiction, and would dominate the novel well into modern times—usually as a character but sometimes as an author. Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell (pronounced "Pole," with a languid drawl) are two of the many old-school snobs who were greater experts on the nuances of hauteur than their nob classmates.

The market for instruction in those nuances seems inexhaustible on both sides of the Atlantic, although the concept of a nuance tends to blur as one travels west. Mr. Morgan, who writes with the brisk intolerance one would expect of a columnist on manners for the *Times* of London, suggests that to be "obsequious" and to be "pushy," both tasteless, are among the snob's typical mistakes. Unlike most of his New World confrères, who specialize in upbeat life-style therapy, he never hesitates to judge behavior as vulgar or rude, and his notion of political correctness is Tory conventionality. "It is bad manners," in Mr. Morgan's book, "to expel any liquid from any orifice in public, and breast-feeding is no different." "Girl ushers" at a formal wedding "give the church the feeling of a cinema." The "worst possible" offense—even greater than presuming to first-name familiarity with a peer or peeress one has just met—is indiscretion with exalted confidences: "If you have conversed privately with a member of the Royal Family at a public occasion, you might be approached for details. Never give anything away. Remember that the most innocent comment made by the Royal Family can be misused mischievously and perniciously by duplicitous journalists, many of whom have their own very unsavoury agendas." Similar advice was offered at the penultimate fin de siècle to acquaintances of a suspiciously cosmopolitan young scribbler who was thought by some to be both obsequious and pushy: Marcel Proust.

One does not have to be a snob to feel queasy at the prospect of being cooped up on a tour bus with the rustic boobs, or perhaps madrasah students, whom Charlotte Ford must have had in mind when she devised the "Travel Protocol Quiz" for her new primer, "21st-Century Etiquette" (The Lyons Press; $24.95). "An essential for a world traveler is: A. Money, B. Passport, C. Tickets, D. All of the above." Answer: D. Miss Ford cannot be faulted on her knowledge of when and how to unfold a napkin or brush off a grasping service provider, like the plumber who dropped his eyeglasses into her cesspool and demanded reimbursement. But since she is trading on her name, she might at least recall that her family made its fortune giving value for money, and that some of her readers may have toiled at unpleasant tasks, even cesspool maintenance, to earn the price of such wisdom as "Smile, it will make you feel better"; "The key to dining out is that it tastes great without the extra effort"; "What's great about marriage is having that one person with whom you can *share* your life." While it's a pity that among her "Do's and Don'ts" for dating ("Do seriously consider the advantages of living with someone") she hasn't included the splendidly pithy motto, borrowed from Disraeli, that helped her father, Henry, to weather his extramarital affairs—"Never complain, never explain"—it seems churlish to make biographical surmises about the skimpiness (ten pages) of her chapter on matrimony. Miss Ford prefers to focus on the question of joint bank accounts (approach them "with serious caution") and allowances for the spouse who doesn't work (preferable to begging for pocket money). Her two paragraphs on formal attire at a wedding take the traditional view that "there's only one woman . . . who should be wearing a white dress," but she notes, with sympathy, that "many men look to dressing in a tuxedo as uncreative, like connecting the dots." I wondered if I should suggest that Ms. deMan look to dressing in a kilt, perhaps one by Galliano, as a creative compromise between self-expression and propriety.

I am sure that Mrs. Post would have been dismayed by those self-styled contemporary experts on gracious living who serve their readers junk food in sentence form with the rationale that slop is what sells, is what the American public is used to, and is all that it can



"Could you give me a little push?"

• •

digest. The hallmark of good breeding has always been simplicity without condescension. Simpleminded garrulity, however, is the hallmark of "The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette" (Doubleday; $32). The original edition, which is to manners what the Toll House cookbook is to haute cuisine, was published in 1952, the year that Dwight Eisenhower was elected President. In half a century, it has sold more than three million copies and been revised twice, most recently in 1995, by Nancy Tuckerman, Jackie Kennedy's former staff coördinator, and Nancy Dunnan, an investment counsellor and Public Radio talk-show host. Doubleday has just announced the arrival in stores of the "50th Anniversary Edition," but before you buy an antiquated reference work you may already own (check under that night table with the broken leg), please note that not a single word in nearly eight hundred flatulent pages has been rewritten or updated for the occasion.

Although "The Amy Vanderbilt" is exhaustive on the subject of wedding planning and protocol, and even includes a sample of a tactful thank-you note for a plastic reindeer—"Dear Fiona: . . . It was thoughtful of you to think of David and me"—there is nothing on fathers who have renounced their masculinity while standing on their paternal prerogatives. But if your goal in life is to slink from birth to death without embarrassment, the authors make passable guides—except, perhaps, in handling the delicate situation of the fellow-guest at a cocktail party whose fly is open. They suggest that you discreetly take him aside and whisper the code words "XYZ." How many of you sophisticates can guess what they mean? (a) Let's blow this joint and find a motel. (b) I've got the plutonium you ordered in my briefcase. Have you brought the payment? (c) Shut up—you're putting me to sleep. (d) Examine your zipper.

Otherwise, there is no aspect of personal hygiene, family relations, or social intercourse that they consider too elementary not to warrant a frank admonition. To make a good first impression,

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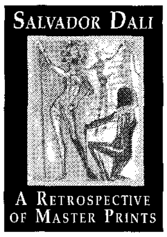
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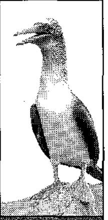

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"be sure there are no unsightly stains on your clothes." New parents are instructed that "a child should be taught to say hello." Anyone planning a dinner party should note that "knives and forks are used for eating European (continental) or American style." It is rude to inquire of a maimed individual how he lost his missing body part, and if you receive an invitation marked "not transferable" you musn't hand it over to someone else. "Obey traffic regulations," because "every life has many crossroads," and there are personal-injury lawyers lurking at most of them. One is obliged to prevent a drunken guest from driving himself home not only out of common decency but "because the host can be sued for serving liquor to an intoxicated person who ends up having an accident." (Should a drunk driver mow down one of your loved ones, try, in your bereavement, "to assume a positive attitude about life.") On a grander note, do not accept an invitation to go foxhunting if you cannot ride, and, if you do accept, "never ride . . . into a stall with a low ceiling." When you retell the story of your weekend in Charlottesville to the guys in your bowling league back in Port Jervis—ever mindful "not to toss or loft your ball into the air"—it would be "ridiculous" to worry whether it is proper to describe your posh friends as "wealthy" or "rich," because such distinctions no longer betray one's class. To be on the safe side, however, just say, "They have lots of money."

If one is interested in visiting the raunchier shores of modern romance and is not too picky either about grammar or about the expulsion of liquids from private orifices, there is "The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Decorum" (Broadway; $14.95). The authors, two fetching Canadians, Kim Izzo and Ceri Marsh, deal with the etiquette of courting and copulating in the same chapter because, they explain, "in the world of the Fabulous Girl, which comes first, sex or dating, may change as often as her lipstick." This little manual has several virtues. The authors are realistic about the way that barely literate, hard-drinking, terminally pert, lust-crazed young female predators actually behave in their natural habitat, and they hold their scout troop to an admirable standard of personal responsibility. When you pick up a stranger in a bar and invite him home to bed, an introduction is in order: "That's right, we mean oral sex." The next morning, however disappointing the boy's performance, he is still your guest: "You fucked him, you can pour him a glass of orange juice." I think, however, it's a bit too High Church to insist that you must "share your toothbrush." And, despite their sound, unsentimental views on adultery ("Practice lying"), and on the unseemly greed of brides over thirty who register for gifts, they must be under thirty themselves to suggest that "natural or street light" sets the most flattering mood for a seduction. When they publish "Still Fab at Forty," look for a chapter on pink lampshades.

Misses Izzo and Marsh have tailored their "Weddings" section to their readers' attention span—thirteen pages, not including two cartoonish "fictional" sketches narrated by FG (Fab Girl) that bracket every chapter to help "illustrate" its "learning curve." On behalf of my young friend's friend with the transgendered father in sartorial limbo, I searched the section high and low for a useful fashion tip, but found nothing apropos. So I turned to the bible of etiquette books, Lord Chesterfield's letters to his bastard son Philip Stanhope, and to his heir and godson, also Philip Stanhope, which were published in 1774. The Earl was a diplomat, courtier, politician, polyglot, and man of fashion as supremely cynical as he was eloquent, who esteemed gallantry above honor, and appearance above substance, and who promoted self-interest at the expense of loyalty. "Weight without lustre is lead," he told his son, and urged him "to shine, not to weigh." "Manner is all, in everything," he continued. "It is by manner only that you can please, and consequently rise. . . . You had better talk trifles elegantly to the most trifling woman, than coarse inelegant sense to the most solid man." Even in his own times, these "pernicious principles" were reviled, and Dr. Johnson observed that his lordship had the "morals of a whore." But the whore and the wise man judge human nature with the same impartial and, at times, tender disenchantment: "No Man is ridiculous for being what he really is, but for affecting to be what he is not." ♦

BOOKS

BOTH SIDES NOW

Doris Lessing's sixties.

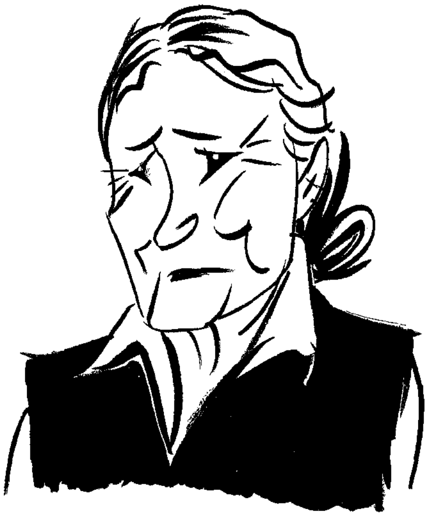
BY LOUIS MENAND

If you're writing a novel about the nineteen-sixties, then you're writing a historical novel, for the nineteen-sixties were a long time ago, and everyone knows how things turned out. And if you're writing a historical novel then you are probably at least as interested in what doesn't change as in what does. In the dazzle of the moment—any moment—people are likely to seem pure reflexes of current conditions. The guy on the cell phone with the flag pin in his lapel has "Bush II" written all over him. Back in the days of Bush I, he was probably a slob who bummed rides and wore a Megadeth T-shirt, unrecognizable even to his present self. From a novelist's point of view, though, the flag pin and the T-shirt can seem surface events, exterior decoration on an unvarying internal structure. That inside space used to be called "human nature," a term with regrettable universalist implications. Now we call it "hardwiring," and feel much better about ourselves. But it is basically the same thing: the residue of personality that no change can corrode.

Doris Lessing's "The Sweetest Dream" (HarperCollins; $26.95), which is her twenty-fourth novel and something like her fiftieth book, is about the nineteen-sixties and their aftermath. About two-thirds of the story takes place in London, in a big house inhabited by an extended family and its hangers-on; the rest takes place in Africa, in a Zimbabwe-like nation called Zimlia. It is a fairly cold book.

An Author's Note offers the following advice, or, possibly, warning: "I am not writing volume three of my autobiography"—the first two volumes, "Under My Skin" and "Walking in the Shade," took Lessing up to 1962—"because of possible hurt to vulnerable people. Which does not mean I have novelised autobiography. . . . I hope I have managed to recapture the spirit of, particularly, the Sixties, that contradictory time which, looking back and comparing it with what came later, seems surprisingly innocent." This is so evenly balanced between invitation and rebuff that no doubt the wise response is to ignore it. What Lessing means to say, apparently, is: This is not my story, but these are my sixties.

The central figure in the book is a fortyish woman named Frances. She is divorced from her Communist husband, a ridiculous fraud with the nom de guerre Comrade Johnny, and she lives with their two sons in the house of her former mother-in-law, Julia, who also considers Johnny a sponger and a fool. Frances is (in the language of the time) an Earth Mother: self-effacing, welcoming to every stray and dropout who shows up at her door, mature and maternal but by no means asexual. Like her creator, she is an accomplished cook, a writer (of nonfiction), and a person with a social conscience who detests campaigns and causes. In the twenty or so years the story covers, Frances manages to provide shelter and succor to her sons' girlfriends (one of whom they share), her ex-husband's crazy ex-wife and his anorexic stepdaughter, her lover's crazy ex-wife and *their* two children, various of her sons' school friends, assorted runaways, a couple of African children brought to England by the stepdaughter (who then dies), and, at the end, the unreconstructed Johnny himself, who lives in the basement and drinks toasts to the memory of Joseph Stalin.

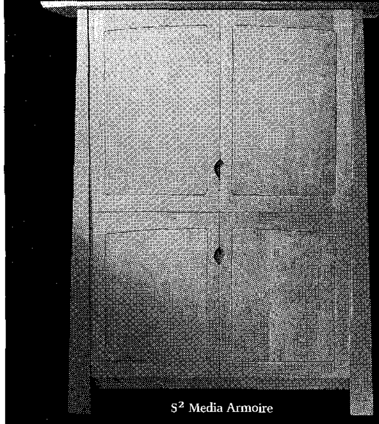


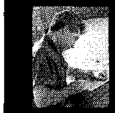
Doris Lessing

TOM BACHTELL

With the equivocal license granted by the Author's Note, a reader might conclude that Lessing's nineteen-sixties consisted mainly of an effort to secure private happiness in a world of idiotic political posturing and lousy family dynamics. Most of the characters, apart from Frances and her mother-in-law, parrot the self-serving Marxist slogans of Comrade Johnny, who shows up regularly at the house to deliver speeches in which he says things like "Fidel is a genuinely great man. He is pointing us all the way into the future." The kids find this "groovy." Most of them are from middle-class families, but they shoplift the goodies they want and travel on the Underground without paying the fare, on the theory that they are helping to destroy the capitalist order. They think their parents are "shits," and "all used the word fascist as easily as they said fuck, or shit, not necessarily meaning much more than this was somebody they disapproved of." As the story unfolds into the nineteen-seventies and eighties, the characters adopt feminist, anti-colonialist, and other politically correct attitudes as well. And nearly all of them, including Frances, suffer from some sort of primal emotional deprivation. Their mothers are abusive or depressive; their fathers are indifferent or absent or dead. Every character carries his or her special load of guilt and anger.

In 1960, Lessing turned forty-one. She had been married and divorced twice, had three children, and had passed through a period of political activism as a Communist, first in Rhodesia, where she grew up, and then in London, where she moved in 1949. She was well known in England as one of the (female) Angry Young Men; and her novel "The Golden Notebook," published in 1962, made her famous nearly everywhere. As an artist, she had already arrived; as a woman, she did not have much to learn from the student re-





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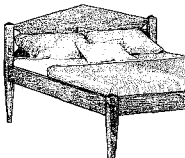

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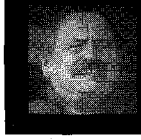

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bellion or the sexual revolution. They must have seemed cartoon versions of her own experiences, illustrations of the second-time-as-farce syndrome. It is not surprising that the nineteen-sixties, in her novel, figure as a time of self-righteous posturing, relieved mainly by naïveté and ineffectuality.

It is when the younger characters grow up and take their places in the world that their silliness begins to have consequences. The purpose of the African sections of the story is to show us how some of these ignorant, selfish, and spoiled kids have become ignorant, selfish, and spoiled adults. One is now a minister of the newly liberated Zimlia; another is a lawyer at a World Bank-type outfit that dispenses largesse to the Zimlians, none of which makes its way to the people who need it; a third is a muckraking journalist out to smear anyone unfriendly to Zimlia's Marxist regime. Like the radicals in the sixties part of the book, Johnny and his comrades, these are all utopians (some are genuine utopians, some are opportunists, some have lost the ability to know the difference), and utopianism, the "sweet dream" of a world without suffering, is the novel's great and unmitigated evil. There *is* room for virtue in the world, but it is the virtue of individual acts of charity—the acts of people like Frances, tirelessly cooking supper for everyone who turns up in her kitchen, and Sylvia, the former anorexic, who works herself to death trying to run a hospital in rural Zimlia.

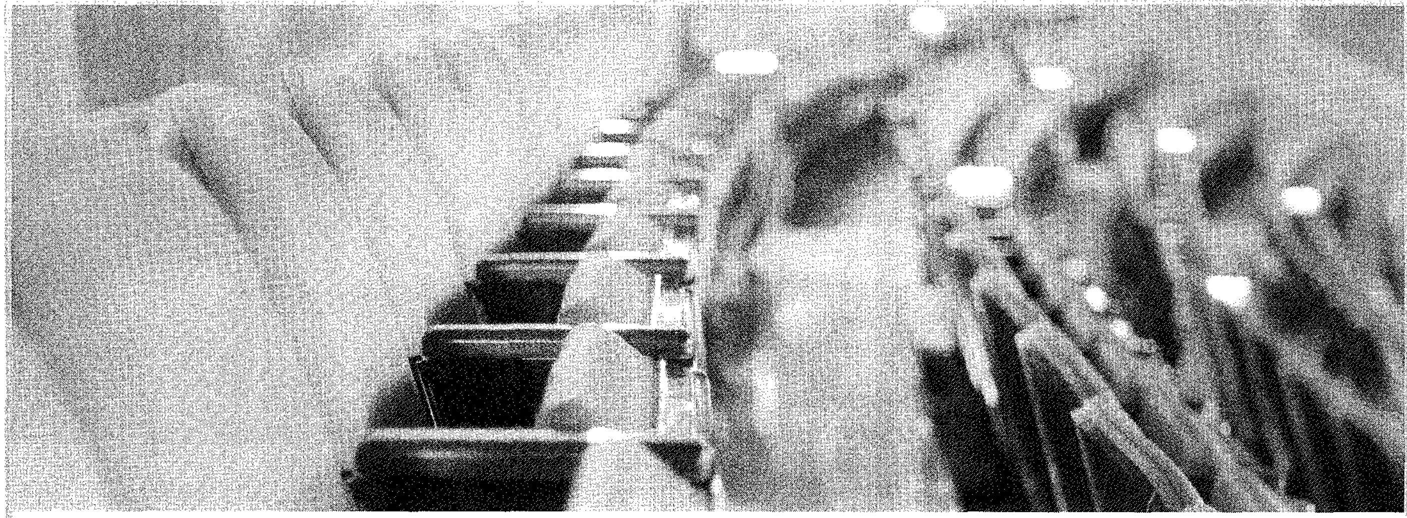
What virtuous people perpetually struggle against is not political ideology, for ideology (as Lessing imagines it) is really just a mask for resentment. Marxism is one form of resentment; feminism is another. "Some people have come to think that our—the human being's—greatest need is to have something or somebody to hate," the narrator explains. (The narrator is not shy of explanations.)

> For decades the upper classes, the middle class, had fulfilled this useful function, earning (in communist countries) death, torture and imprisonment, and in more equable countries like Britain, merely obloquy, or irritating obligations, like having to acquire a cockney accent. But now this creed showed signs of wearing thin. The new enemy, men, was even more useful, since it encompassed half the human race. From one end of the world to the other, women were sitting in judgment on men . . . telling little anecdotes of this man's crassness or that man's delinquency. . . . Never have there been smugger, more self-righteous, unself-critical people.

To readers who know only "The Golden Notebook"—or only the reputation of "The Golden Notebook"—this may seem like recanting. It is not. "The Golden Notebook" is the story of a woman, Anna Wulf, trying to break out of a prison of abstractions. Some of these abstractions are Marxian, some are Freudian, some are just the superstitions acquired by living in a society in which women's pain and pleasure count for less. The point (if one can speak this way about a novel) is not that Marxism, Freudianism, and sexism are bad—and We Shall Overcome. The point is that happiness is always threatened by abstractions, of whatever time or political tendency. In mid-century London, for a woman like Anna, Marx and Freud and self-absorbed boyfriends happened to be the forms that oppression took. Today, there are different invitations to self-destruction. Feminism, for instance.

Happiness is also threatened by the tendency of human beings to use and emotionally abuse other human beings, and that tendency, "The Sweetest Dream" insists, is eternal. Utopianism is evil not only because it countenances real suffering today in the name of abstract justice tomorrow. It is evil because it teaches perfectibility. Part of being happy is knowing how to live with people the way they are, and with yourself, the way you are. If feminism means changing the way men are, rather than dealing with men the way they are, then Lessing is not a feminist. What makes her work so cold is not her disapproval of the ideals and illusions of other people, although that disapproval is chilling enough. It is her fatalism. The belief that people can remake themselves by catching up with the times is one of the illusions she mocks: it's why there is so little about London in the nineteen-sixties in this novel about London in the nineteen-sixties. "We carry invisible templates as ineluctably ourselves as fingerprints, but we don't know about them until we look around us and see them mirrored," she says. Giving people a mirror to see themselves in is one of the reasons for writing a novel. ♦

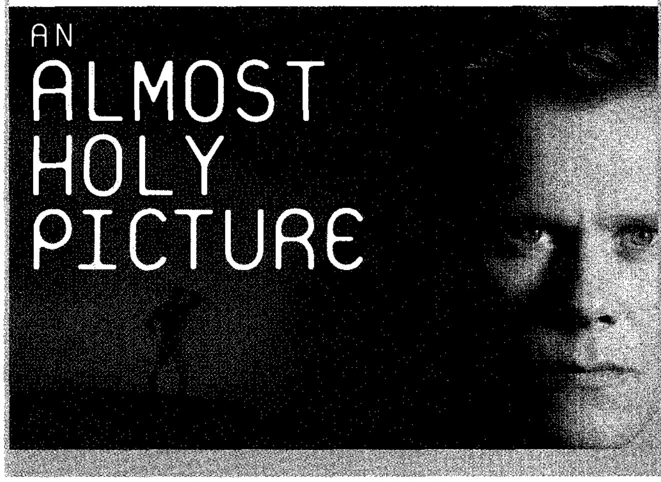
SPOTLIGHT ON culture



With a season that's as opulent as the Met, as abstract as Albee, and as hoarse as Elaine [Stritch, that is] the New York cultural scene is just heating up. And there's never been a better time to experience the eagerly anticipated revivals as well as the brand new thespian offerings.

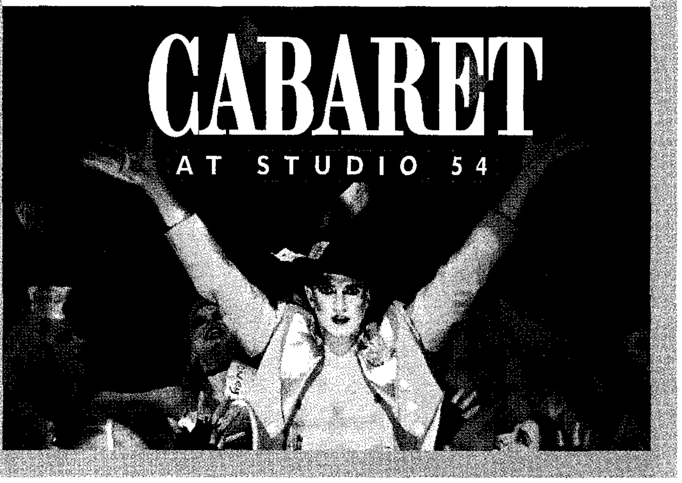
An Almost Holy Picture

Kevin Bacon stars in his much-anticipated Broadway debut. This beautifully crafted, wonderfully touching drama illuminates the tale of a man who has heard God's call, but can't comprehend His mysteries. This is a performance you won't want to miss. **The American Airlines Theatre, 227 West 42nd Street, 212-719-1300** or **www.roundabouttheatre.org**

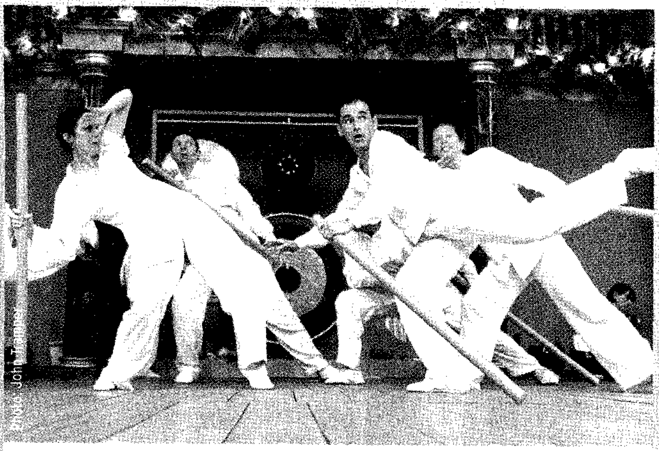


Cabaret

Roundabout's Tony Award®-winning reinvention of "Cabaret" has dazzled critics and audiences alike. "Sensational . . . absolutely mesmerizing!" says *The New Yorker*. In its fourth glorious year, it is "still the best musical on Broadway!" exclaims the *New York Post*. Now starring Molly Ringwald and Raúl Esparza. **Studio 54, 254 West 54th Street, 212-239-6200** or **www.telecharge.com**



SPOTLIGHT ON culture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Cymbeline at BAM

Experience Shakespeare's Globe at BAM. Headed by the virtuosic Mark Rylance, who is touted by *Artforum* as "the most gifted English-language actor of his generation," an ultraversatile cast of six assume thirty roles in this delightful and riotous performance of Shakespeare's redemptive tale of love nearly lost. Running March 5th to 17th only. **BAM Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton Street, 718-636-4100** or **www.bam.org**

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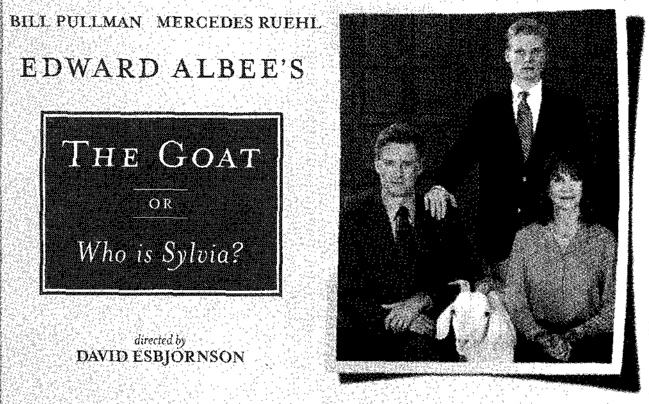
"Extraordinary . . . terrific songs, hilarious gossip, and intimate confessions," raves *The New Yorker*. "Elaine Stritch at Liberty" is now on Broadway and there are only eighty chances to see the performance people will be talking about for years to come. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* calls this "the season's one indispensable ticket." **Neil Simon Theatre, 250 West 52nd Street, 212-307-4100** or **www.ticketmaster.com**

The Goat

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Edward Albee *forever changed theatre with his brilliant drama*, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Now, he returns to the modern American family with the most startling love story Broadway has ever seen. Bill Pullman and Mercedes Ruehl star; David Esbjornson directs. Performances begin February 16th. **Golden Theatre, 252 West 45th Street, 212-239-6200** or **www.telecharge.com**



The Last Five Years

Hailed by *Time* magazine as one of the year's ten best, "The Last Five Years" is the new musical from Tony Award®-winning composer Jason Robert Brown. This fresh and contemporary show chronicles a young man and woman's romance in a new and exciting way: her story starts at the end of their relationship; his begins on the day they meet. **Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, 212-307-4100** or **www.ticketmaster.com**

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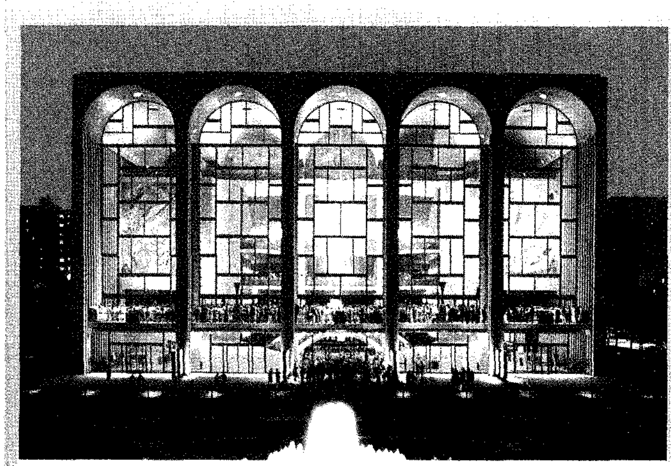


The Metropolitan Opera

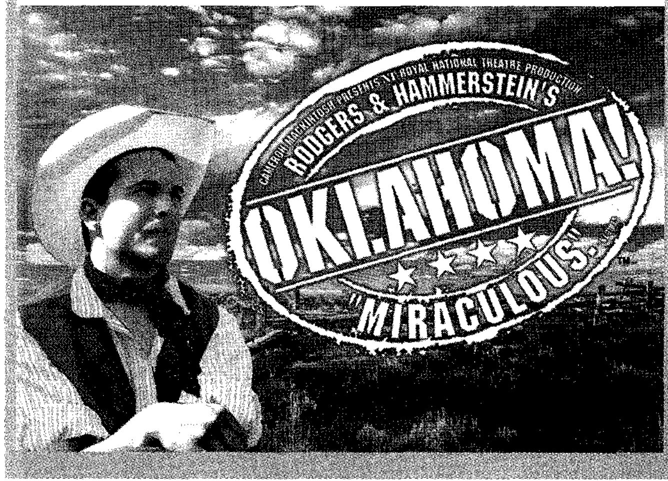
Enjoy the world's greatest singers and the spectacular scenery, costumes, and stagecraft that make each performance at The Metropolitan Opera a grand experience. The Met's subtitles provide continuous English translation on individual screens at all performances. Through May 11th. **The Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center, 212-362-6000** or **www.metopera.org**

Noises Off

"A spectacularly funny festival of delirium," raves *The New York Times*' Ben Brantley about Broadway's biggest smash hit comedy. Patti LuPone and Peter Gallagher star in Michael Frayn's hilarious play. Joan Hamburg of WOR Radio cheers, "I laughed so hard I was embarrassed!" **Brooks Atkinson Theatre, 256 West 47th Street, 212-307-4100** or **www.ticketmaster.com**

Oklahoma!

In 1943, Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" heralded the dawn of the Golden Age of musical theatre. Now, the Royal National Theatre's brilliant reinvention of this vibrant musical comes to Broadway. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* calls it, "A triumphant production choreographed by Susan Stroman and directed by Trevor Nunn." **Gershwin Theatre, 222 West 51st Street, 212-307-4100** or **www.oklahoma-themusical.com**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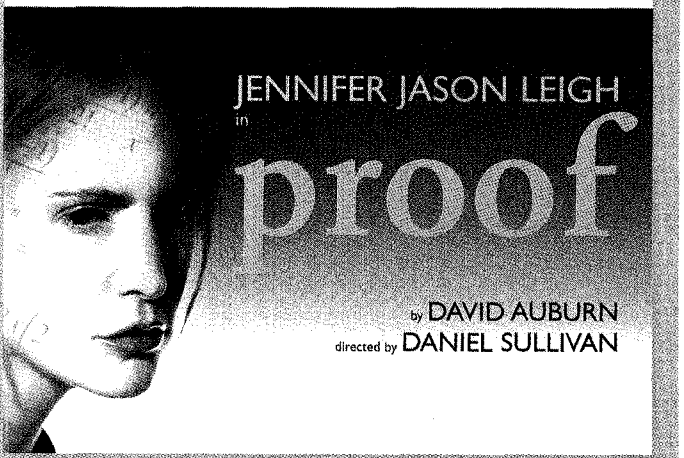

JENNIFER JASON LEIGH
in
proof
by DAVID AUBURN
directed by DANIEL SULLIVAN

SPOTLIGHT ON culture

THE PUBLIC THEATER

BY ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN
DIRECTED BY TONY KUSHNER

Helen at The Public Theater

In Ellen McLaughlin's comedy of consequences, Donna Murphy as Helen of Troy is locked away in a Cairo hotel room. Between facials and protein shakes, this aging beauty waits for the war to end and for her husband, Meneleus, to uncover the mystery of her strange disappearance. "Helen" marks Tony Kushner's New York directorial debut. Running February 26th to March 31st. **The Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, 212-239-6200** or **www.publictheater.org**

THE PUBLIC THEATER

BY NAOMI IIZUKA
DIRECTED BY MARK WING-DAVEY

36 Views at The Public Theater

Naomi Iizuka's new play teems with poetry, suspense, and intrigue. Gloriously interwoven into the ensuing drama are exquisite passages from a priceless, one-of-a-kind Japanese Pillow Book, which mysteriously reveals the contradictions of the characters' inner lives. A co-production with Berkeley Repertory Theatre running March 12th to April 14th. **The Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, 212-239-6200** or **www.publictheater.org**

The Tale of the Allergist's Wife

Valerie Harper, Tony Roberts, and Michele Lee star in "The Tale of the Allergist's Wife," a smash hit comedy by Charles Busch, directed by Lynne Meadow. Audiences are howling, and the critics are raving. "Uproarious, wall-to-wall laughs," cheers *The New York Times*. "Dazzlingly witty," says Liz Smith. **Ethel Barrymore Theater, 243 West 47th Street, 212-239-6200** or **www.allergistswife.com**

PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

Thoroughly Modern Millie

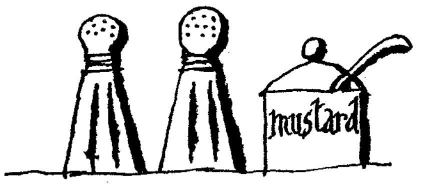
Manhattan, 1922: The Jazz Age. Elevators and hemlines are hitting bold new heights, and women are blazing smart new trails. Millie Dillmount's arrived just in time to join the "moderns" and take on the town. This spring's only new musical comedy begins March 19th. **Marquis Theatre, Broadway at 46th Street, 212-307-4100** or **www.modernmillie.com**

THOROUGHLY MODERN
millie
The Musical

BRIEFLY NOTED

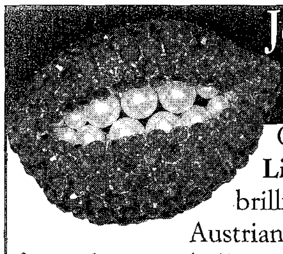
The Shape of a Pocket, *by John Berger (Pantheon; $24).* For some fifty years, the reclusive British writer John Berger has thought a great deal about art and artists, and this collection of essays includes a moving tribute to Frida Kahlo and a brilliant meditation on the achievement of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi. But everything Berger has written—essays, novels, criticism, screenplays—has been filled with his passionate concern for what used to be called the state of man. That preoccupation is on every page here, whether he is recalling the patience of Antonio Gramsci or discussing Degas's nudes. When Berger was young, his urgent left-wing politics sometimes thrust him into the role of provocateur. Now he is no less committed to making the hidden visible, but his sensibility has widened and deepened; his exegesis of the significance for us of the Fayum portraits, discovered in Egypt in the late eighteen-hundreds, is especially piercing. Berger is one of the few writers who answer questions we don't know to ask.

The City in Mind: Notes on the Urban Condition, *by James Howard Kunstler (Free Press; $25).* In "The Geography of Nowhere," Kunstler lamented the degradation of the American landscape. In this excitable, funny, sometimes high-handed disquisition on the future of metropolitan life, he alternately praises and damns eight of the world's most interesting cities. He hits hardest at Atlanta: more atrocity than metropolis, he says, the city is crippled by its excessive dependency on cars and developers, enslaved to its nonsensical suburbs, and incapable of functioning properly. Kunstler is equally dyspeptic in his portrait of Las Vegas ("If Las Vegas truly is our city of the future, then we might as well all cut our own throats tomorrow"), but elsewhere he is more balanced, as in his analyses of architectural and socioeconomic complexity in Rome, Berlin, and Mexico City. The fact that the author stays away from overanalyzed New York City is a blessing, but his pins-on-the-map approach gives this book a somewhat cursory feel, and his praise (especially for Boston, which he commends for its organic neighborhoods and its foot traffic) is ultimately less effective than his criticism.



The Gloves, *by Robert Anasi (North Point; $24).* The writer, in his last year of eligibility for the Golden Gloves, goes into serious training with the Supreme Team, a Fourteenth Street squad run by Milton LaCroix, a charismatic smooth talker who favors an unorthodox hook. ("Throw it like you're pimp-slapping someone, Bob. Look.") At first, Anasi gets pummelled—the boss on his day job assumes he's been on a drinking binge—but soon he loses fifteen pounds and, according to LaCroix, turns into a "Mini-Me Mike Tyson." This account of his arduous work in the ring is as gripping as any Arctic chronicle, but as the author's boxing skills increase he turns his attention to his sparring partners and fellow gym rats—Laura, the heavy-punching accountant; Curtis, the aging ex-contender; Six-Depot Joe, who's friends with everyone—and makes a rough lyric out of their hard lives.

Visits from the Seventh, *by Sarah Arvio (Knopf; $22).* This extraordinary first book of poems takes its place in an authentic line of descent from such landmarks as Yeats's "A Vision" and James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover." A series of forty-nine narratives detail conversations with those in the hereafter—who, it turns out, are no more reliable than their earthly counterparts, a cast of "gypsies and fantasists, conmen and creeps." But the true subject here is the emotional cost of such celestial intimacies for the human narrator, whose future must always remain hidden. For her, loneliness and mortality are not merely conditions to be recalled but present afflictions to be endured, and she can only pray, "Give me what I can bear to know I felt."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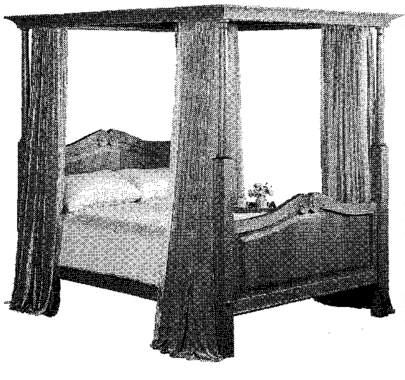

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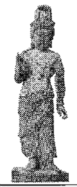

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THE THEATRE

HOMELAND DEFENSE

An exile's return.

BY JOHN LAHR

"You and me. That is how it starts. The two factors in an equation which resolves out into either heaven or hell, and most likely both," the South African playwright Athol Fugard writes in the introduction to "Blood Knot" (1961), which was the first major play to put a black person and a white person together on his nation's stage. Over the past forty years, in a number of plays that have dared to breach South Africa's racial divide, Fugard has borne witness to the nameless and the destitute in his beautiful and barbarous corner of the world. His plays have done their work: they helped to build the consensus that dismantled apartheid and culminated, in 1994, with the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black President. But with that shift in power has come a shift in taste. "There's definitely a tendency . . . to ignore the contributions that other racial groups made to the struggle," Fugard told the *Times* last year. "People are wanting to claim their own voices and the right to speak for themselves. So I think there's an impatience with me now." Fugard, who lives half the year in Southern California and the other half in the Karoo, finds himself asking, "Am I going to be South Africa's first literary redundancy?" His compelling "Sorrows and Rejoicings" (which he also directed, at the Second Stage) addresses this dilemma. Here, caught between his desire for social revolution and regret at his marginalization, the sixty-nine-year-old playwright adds his own testimony to South Africa's legacy of waste and violation.

"Sorrows and Rejoicings" tells the tale of a dying white poet, Dawid Olivier (John Glover), who has returned to his village after sixteen years of political exile in London to reconnect with his liberated homeland, and with his black mistress, Marta (Charlayne Woodard), and their light-skinned teen-age daughter, Rebecca (Marcy Harriell). When the curtain comes up, Dawid has just been buried. His widow, Allison (Judith Light), a white South African whose formal black suit suggests a demure, pragmatic nature, and Marta, in a loose-fitting patterned dress that hints at her graciousness of spirit, return to the Olivier family home and piece together their shared history with Dawid, who materializes as a projection of their memories.

The space between Allison and Marta is contained and civilized, a fact emphasized by the large, uncluttered stage. It is dominated by a door frame, whose threshold for most of the evening the Bolshie Rebecca resolutely refuses to cross, and by an oblong table made from the indigenous stinkwood tree. Marta—whose sweetness and suffering are delicately conveyed by Woodard—is the family maid, and her obsessive polishing of the table over the years has yielded a rich, textured mocha-and-blond veneer. For her, the table is alive with meaning. "It remembers those days," she says, speaking for the wood, "when its head was full of the songs of the birds and the chattering of monkeys, when big elephants rubbed up against it. And it also remembers him." The stinkwood table is where Dawid wrote his poetry and stood to declaim it, and where, by implication, he and Marta made love. The table, whose essential quality is its blend of light and dark hues, is Dawid's legacy (he passes it on to Rebecca, who may or may not accept it); it is also Marta's—a totem of her oppression and of her joy—and the focus of her arguments with her daughter. "Stinkwood Marta," Rebecca sneers, "looking after her dead Masters and Madams."

On the walls of the Olivier house, a wash of turbulent browns suggests the dramatic South African sky that presses down on the characters. In this unbounded setting, the inside is turned out, and the events in the room seem to merge with the land beyond. Landscape defines language as much as language defines landscape. (In America, for instance, both the tall talk of the nineteenth century and the

John Glover and Charlayne Woodard cross South Africa's racial divide in Athol Fugard's new play. Photograph by Bruce Davidson.

hyperbole of our own time are attempts to use words to fill a vast and vague land.) "I feared I'd forget my Latin language" begins "Sorrows," a poem by Ovid, another political exile, which Dawid quotes from in the play. By abandoning his homeland, the expatriate abandons the source of his language—his sense of place. In the damp, gray confinement of his exile, Dawid's poetic spirit atrophies; he begins to drink and to disintegrate. His syntax, his sound, even the sludge of speech that defines him and his place on earth mutate. "The ink in my fountain pen has clotted and dried up like the blood in a dead man's veins," he tells Allison as they quarrel over his collapse. "God knows I've tried to get it flowing again, but if my writing ever had a heart it has stopped beating. I'm drought-stricken."

Dawid's return to South Africa is, among other things, an attempt to rediscover the taproot of his inspiration. "Sing yourself to where the singing comes from," Seamus Heaney says in "At the Wellhead." Dawid does just that. The sight of his Karoo village turns him into a whirlwind of desperation and delight. He can hardly contain himself. As Glover plays him, Dawid is transformed into a kind of histrionic gusher, from whom sounds and sensations and memories pour. In a flashback in the penultimate scene, when he faces Marta and speaks her name—the play's best moment—words spill out of him and, through their shared idiom, an intimacy emerges. "Marta Barends! When I roll that around in my mouth I taste Karoo food, Karoo sweetness," Dawid says, pulling her close and entrancing her with a hypnotic blend of English and Afrikaans. "Warm crusty brown bread just out of the oven and honey, wild Aloe honey, thorn-tree honey. *Warm Bruin Brood en Doringboom Heuning!* Incredible isn't it . . . an almost perfect little poem." The poem will live in Marta's memory but not on paper, an

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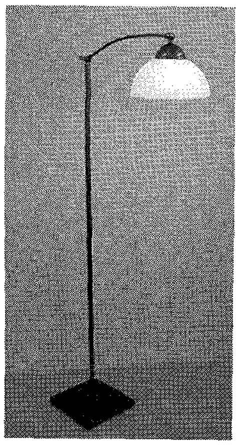

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irony that is brought home to us when we learn from Rebecca, who blames her father for her mother's woes, that she has burned Dawid's early work. "It was the best of him," Allison tells Rebecca, barely restraining her rage. "For your soul's sake, claim it, Rebecca. Rejoice in it. Because if you think you and your new South Africa don't need it, you're making a terrible mistake. You are going to need all the love you can get, no matter where it comes from." Allison's message is unambiguous, but the play's is not. Rebecca and her mother have inherited the white man's kingdom. When they close the door on it, Dawid lingers, kneeling on the stinkwood table with a hand extended toward them. Is it in supplication? Or in salutation? Even Fugard can't know. That's a drama for another day.

"An Almost Holy Picture" (at the American Airlines Theatre) is about nostalgia for the ultimate homeland—the Kingdom of Heaven. Heather McDonald's limpid, well-written monologue is a meditation on the nature of faith and what the German Romantics called *Sehnsucht*, the melancholic longing for the unattainable that was most beautifully defined by Tennessee Williams, in "The Glass Menagerie" (which McDonald quotes), as "that long-delayed but always expected something that we live for." In "An Almost Holy Picture," Samuel Gentle (the appealing Kevin Bacon), a lapsed priest turned groundskeeper for the Church of the Holy Comforter, waits, prays, serves, plants his patch, and dutifully tries to live in a sacramental way for a God who seems, if not dead, at least comatose. Following the traditional Romantic trajectory, Samuel, instead of finding comfort in God, manages to find the miraculous in ordinary life.

The kinds of questions about darkness and light and revelation that "An Almost Holy Picture" raises can't be found on CNN, which is the evening's asset. But the play's incidents are narrated, not dramatized, and that is its limitation. No amount of outstanding talent—neither Michael Mayer's sensitive direction nor the striking scenic design of Mark Wendland, which turns Samuel's garden into a combination of Beckett's "Happy Days" and Gethsemane—can disguise the fact that we're looking at a talking head. ♦

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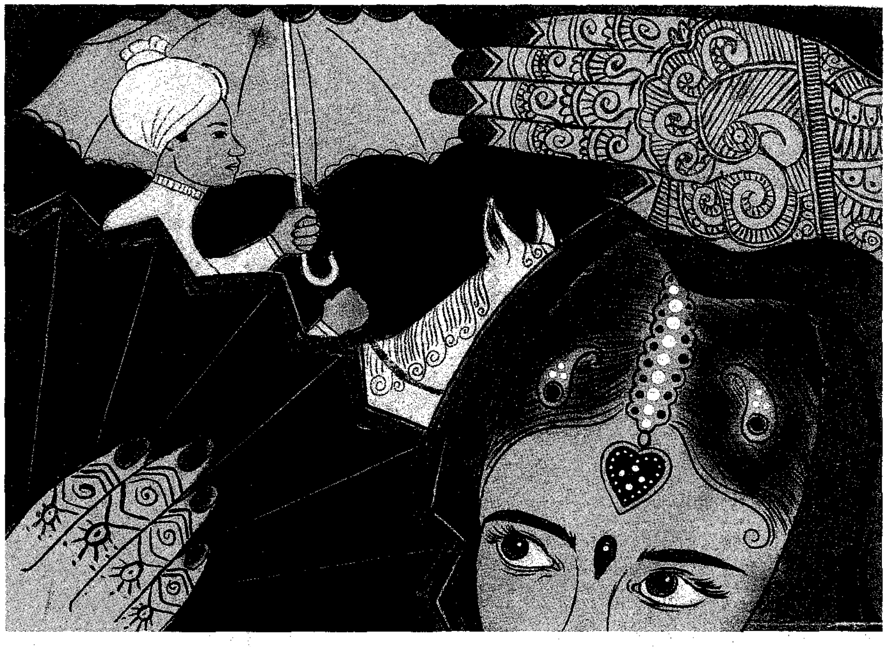
THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

A wedding in Delhi and a wake on the English coast.

BY ANTHONY LANE



Parvin Dabas and Vasundhara Das in Mira Nair's "Monsoon Wedding."

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

While watching "Monsoon Wedding," you may find yourself feeling uncertain about who these people wandering around onscreen are. Have no fear; not only does the rest of the audience feel the same way but so do half of the people themselves. Take Hemant Rai (Parvin Dabas), a young Indian who lives in Houston; having flown into Delhi, where the movie is set, he is introduced, engaged, and married to a young woman named Aditi (Vasundhara Das) all in the space of a few days. Even by Texan standards, this must seem bewildering. Then there is Aditi's extended family. Her father, Lalit Verma (Naseeruddin Shah), is a fretter, whose love for his relations insures that he spends much of his time chewing them out. Her mother, Pimmi (Lillete Dubey), is a more placid soul, although even she tends to vanish into the bathroom for a smoke.

The list goes on forever; there are more than a dozen figures whom, as a matter of dramatic diplomacy, we are asked to memorize. Frankly, if I were Hemant, I would turn around and take the first flight back to the United States; two things, however, keep him from this course. First, he has come home for an arranged marriage; his acquiescence may seem baffling, but it is the movie's business to convince us otherwise. Second, there is no need for him to return to America, because, with all guns blazing—or, at any rate, with laptops glowing—America has already come to India, in a big way. Whatever your notion of Indian TV, I bet it doesn't include a talk show in which the guests are forced to listen to a middle-aged woman with a microphone, who provides the moaning voice-over for an imported porno flick.

While you're still recovering from this lady's unusual talents, the talk-show host, who is married, goes to his dressing room and starts kissing a woman who had been sitting in the audience—Aditi, the one who is to marry Hemant. Why should we be taken aback by this? At a guess, I would trace our disquiet to an unhealthy brew of condescension and misinformation; so

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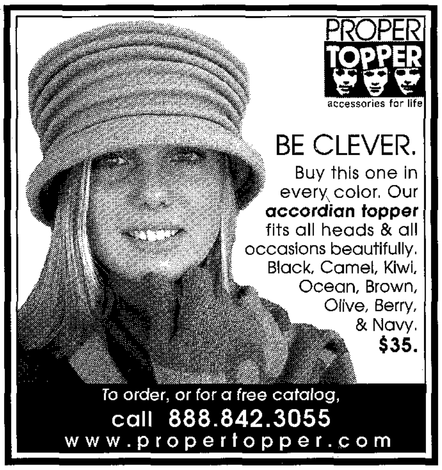
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much of Indian culture—not merely its cinema—is marketed in the West as sensuously chaste, spiced with a backward-looking languor, that, whether as a viewer, a diner, or an impending tourist, you need to summon all your wits to fend off such an unhelpful vision of the quaint. What you need, in short, is Mira Nair, the director of "Monsoon Wedding." Educated at Delhi University and at Harvard, Nair, who came to prominence with "Salaam Bombay," is eminently qualified to break our bad habits. The opening shot of the new movie, after the blue and blood-orange funkiness of the credits, is of marigolds; they flutter down gracefully from a marital bower, whereupon Lalit, who is standing below the flutter, demands to know why the damn flowers are coming apart. And so the tone is set: all lyricism is to be cut short, and, from here on, the contest for Most Annoying Noise is a standoff between cell phones and peacocks. I like to think that Nair is outpacing, or even disowning, the pretensions of her last picture, "Kama Sutra," which played to our most tattered fantasies of the East; when a couple try to make out in "Monsoon Wedding," they do so not on the back of an elephant, laved in essential oils, but in the back seat of an S.U.V., with angry cops thumping on the window.

There are a couple of problems nagging at the film, but Nair heads them off. One is P. K. Dube, who is in charge of the wedding decorations; Vijay Raaz plays him too broadly, with a stuck-on grin, and you don't quite believe his fervent wooing of Alice (Tilotama Shome), Lalit and Pimmi's maid. Yet even he simmers down as a result of a wonderful scene, which finds him travelling back to his lodgings—peeling and paltry, a far cry from the middle-class plushness that envelops his employers. Better still, we get a glimpse of Dube's mother, who is cooing with joy over a rise in the Indian stock market; ambition is blooming in every nook. In a sense, this very surfeit of interest—Nair's reluctance to leave individual tales alone, coupled with Delhi's inability to stop strewing them like seeds—leads to the second and more serious threat. How can such fertile jostling begin to cohere?

That it does so depends on a late diversion in the plot. The wedding juggernaut is rolling, and quite unstoppable, when the camera, throwing a glance over the guests, happens upon Tej Puri (Rajat Kapoor)—one of the older relations—offering a flower to a young girl. She flips it back at him, as if in disgust, and from that quick gesture springs a hidden history; you instantly want to know what he has done to offend this child. The only person who notices the incident is Ria Verma (Shefali Shetty), the bride's unmarried cousin, and, as she pieces the truth together, the handsome Tej, who used to look as noble as a sparrow hawk, dwindles before our eyes into a dirty old crow.

What do you do with a shameful secret, once it comes to light? Ria tells Lalit to take action, and at first he refuses; then, in a sudden and astounding scene, he throws Tej out of the house. What matters about this moment is not that it is good or brave, though it is both of those things, but that it is modern. Lalit's background—the voice of his nation—compels him to put family unity before anything else, at any cost, but for once he listens to the call of a younger tongue. "Monsoon Wedding" is a scruffy, thick-grained piece of work, shot in thirty days and scrawled not with luscious coloring but with the tense and inky markings of a society that is fighting to keep its reputation for togetherness, and wondering what that reputation is still worth. When the assembled company manage to join forces at the end, in a drenched and glittering dance, their happiness seems all the more hard-earned, like a diamond dug out of the mud. Look at Lalit waltzing, in the closing image, with his own maid; to Indian eyes, that counts as an act of the purest revolution. Where will it end?

Almost the first thing we see in "Last Orders" is a map of Australia in a travel brochure. It's a nod to the director, Fred Schepisi, an Australian whose best work—notably "The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith"—was shot in his homeland, who went to America for movies like "Roxanne," and who has now travelled to England for a fine study of bad

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weather and bereavement, set in the nineties, with a wild cinematic palette that runs all the way from gray to beige.

Three friends gather in a pub to mourn a fourth. The three are Lenny (David Hemmings), Vic (Tom Courtenay), and Ray (Bob Hoskins). The fourth was the local butcher, Jack (Michael Caine), whose ashes are placed in a container on the counter. The friends are surprised that so strong a presence should have been reduced to so little: "That it?" "That's 'im." In accordance with his wishes, and by way of a pilgrimage, they are driven by Jack's son Vince (Ray Winstone) to Margate, on the coast, where they scatter what remains of Jack into the English Channel. In fact, this final scene is the best: cold rain hosing their faces, nothing to look forward to but another pint of beer, and the camera edging to the brink of the sea wall and gazing blankly out.

The rest of the film is a revisiting; in continual flashback, we lean into the past—to the men's military service in the Second World War, to the boozy irrigation of their fellowship, to Ray's cautious affair with Jack's wife, Amy (Helen Mirren), and to some spectacular seventies hair styles. (Top marks to Hoskins for his bear-cub-on-my-scalp effect.) Other actors gamely play the friends' former selves, although the standout is Kelly Reilly, who impersonates the young Helen Mirren; there's an openness about Reilly, a flush of genial lust, that lifts the movie briefly out of its blues. The main actors are vastly experienced, of course, yet there's something underpowered, even unrehearsed, about their interplay; each man waits politely for his chum to finish a line before delivering his own, whereas the older your acquaintances, surely, the more you should feel free to interrupt. In short, Schepisi's adaptation of Graham Swift's novel—"Last Orders" won the Booker Prize in 1996—never quite shrugs off its literary manners, and you feel a hand on your shoulder, gently guiding you through a thesis on the sad decline of England. As such, it works horribly well; the past is all hop-picking in the ripening fields of Kent, and the present consists of concrete intersections cutting numbly through the flatlands. "Monsoon Wedding" makes you want to go to India, where there is everything to play for; "Last Orders" makes you want to get out of England fast and never look back. ♦

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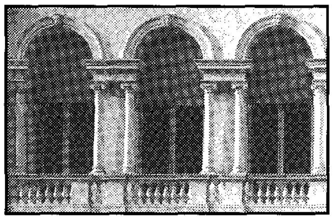

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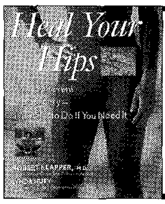

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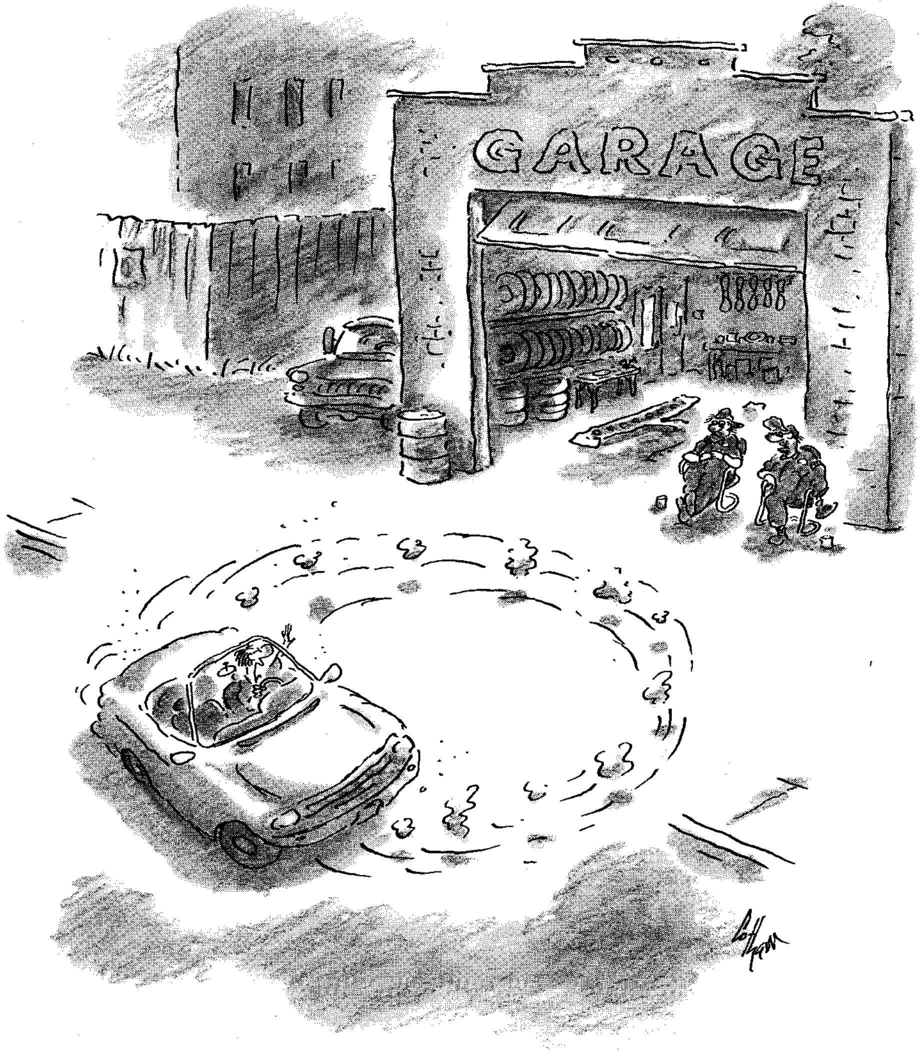

"At what point does this become our problem?"

Every cartoonist knows that the temporary warping of reality that drives a cartoon is hard to pull off even when you're in full control of both the picture (with its delicate balance of characters and props) and the caption (which demands rhythm, brevity, and surprise). So it seems particularly daunting to try to create a good cartoon when the picture is completely out of your control. Yet that's exactly what we asked our readers to do in our third annual cartoon-caption contest: to look at a drawing by Frank Cotham and complete it with a caption. More than two thousand of you courageously answered the challenge.

Most of the entries were preoccupied with the fact that the car seems to be spinning in an eternal circle. Some readers imagined that the car had been overcorrected from a permanent clockwise spin. Others suggested that it was under the spell of the Coriolis effect, which deals with the influence of the earth's rotation on moving objects. Those captions which didn't focus on the car focussed on the two mechanics. Along with captions proposing churlish mechanics and clownish mechanics, we received entries with philosophical mechanics (*"I am reminded that the pleasures of life, like those of travel, lie in the journey rather than the arrival,"* Michael Lewis) and malicious mechanics (*"Come on, just tell him you hear the noise,"* David Overman). In a few entries, the mechanics were absurdly specific in their diagnosis: *"Either he's got right-occipital-lobe hypertrophy complicated by a limbic-system imbalance or his wheels need realignment"* (Stuart Feuer).

The mechanics may be brain surgeons, but we aren't, and, in the end, we went for the simplest caption. The last caption standing, finally, was the one that did more with less while most accurately reflecting our sensibility. Reprinted above, it was written by Jennifer Truelove, of Hoboken, New Jersey. She is this year's winner. To see more of this year's worthy entries—and to see if yours is among them—visit http://cartoonbank.com/capcontest.asp.♦

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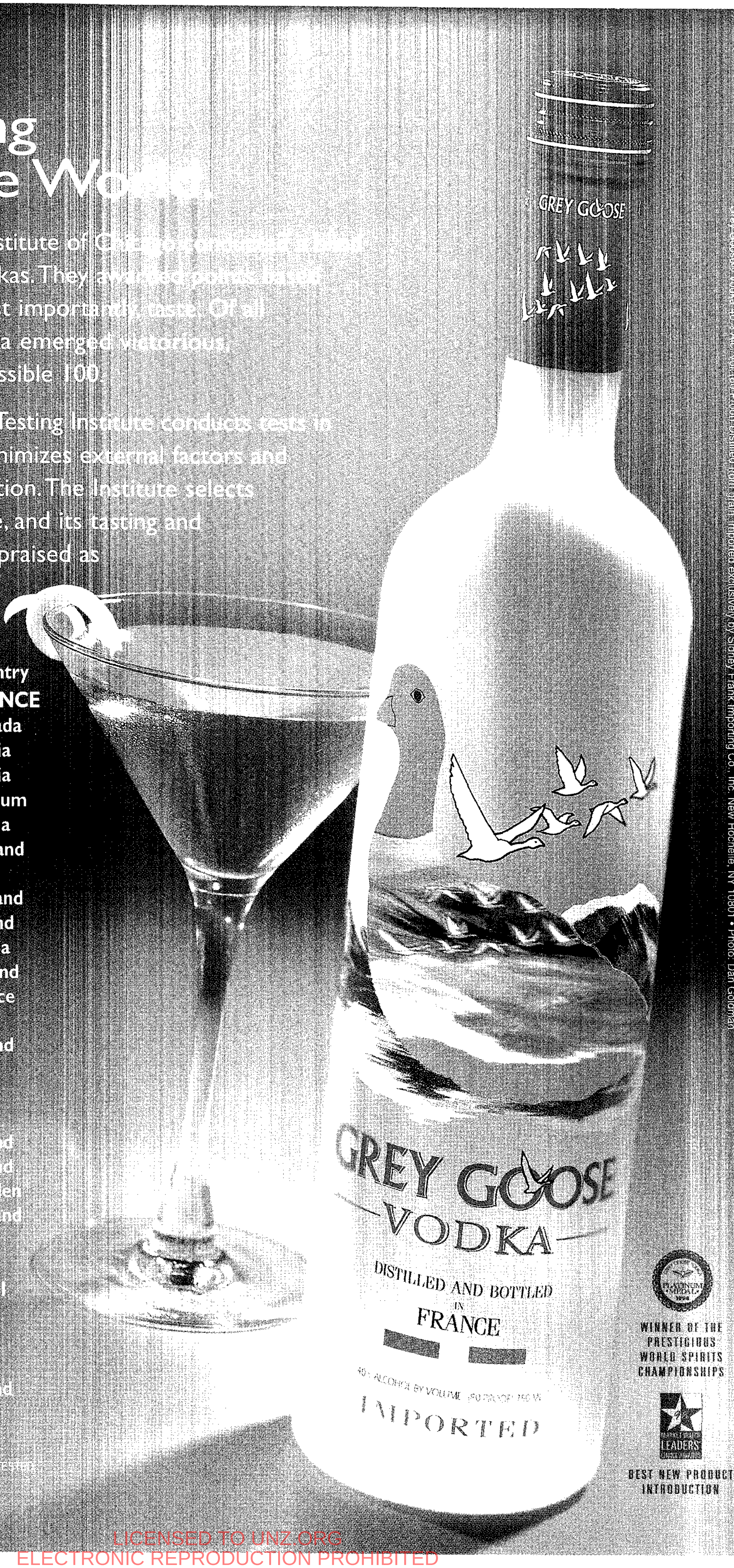
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93	Stolichnaya Gold Vodka	Russia
92	Staraya Moskva Premium	Russia
91	Van Hoo Vodka	Belgium
91	Stolichnaya Vodka	Russia
90	Tanqueray Sterling Vodka	England
90	Rain 1995 Harvest Vodka	USA
89	Ketel One Vodka	Holland
88	Wyborowa Vodka	Poland
87	Kremlyovskaya Vodka	Russia
86	Finlandia Vodka of Finland	Finland
86	Alps French Vodka	France
85	Skyy Vodka	USA
82	Original Polish Vodka	Poland
82	Glenmore Special	USA
82	Fleischmann's Royal Vodka	USA
81	Mr. Boston Vodka	USA
80	Pole Star Vodka	Poland
80	Luksusowa Potato Vodka	Poland
80	Absolut Vodka	Sweden
78	Cardinal Vodka	Holland
78	Barton Vodka	USA
78	Barclay's Vodka	USA
78	Amazon Vodka	Brazil
76	Skol Vodka	USA
74	Smirnoff Vodka	USA
74	Crystal Palace Vodka	USA
74	Belvedere	Poland
72	Schenley	USA
69	Mr. Boston's Riva Vodka	USA

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